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# THE MISSING TWO

BY  
MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS

R

" Oh Mill ! How secret you seem !  
How mad !  
How wicked you look, black sails ! "

LEWIS RANDS



HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LONDON  
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Made and Printed for Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.  
by Jarrold & Sons, Ltd.  
The Empire Press, Norwich

1821

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE BEAUTY OF GORCHESTER . . .	9
II. THE PENALTIES OF POPULARITY . . .	19
III. GARRIE GOES STAR-GAZING . . .	30
IV. THE OLD MILL . . .	39
V. WHAT HAPPENED THERE? . . .	46
VI. THE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM . . .	55
VII. CONSULTING DILYS . . .	64
VIII. PUZZLED . . .	75
IX. WHERE IS IRMA? . . .	86
X. THINGS LOOK BAD . . .	95
XI. TACKLING PHILIP . . .	104
XII. THE BLOODSTAIN . . .	115
XIII. MISS HAWKE PERPLEXED . . .	128
XIV. THE POLICE CALLED IN . . .	138
XV. WHAT THEY FOUND IN THE WATER . . .	148
XVI. SEARCHING THE MILL . . .	159
XVII. DILYS TRIES AND FAILS . . .	166
XVIII. GARRIE CROSS-EXAMINED . . .	180
XIX. TYRE-MARKS ON THE CLIFF ROAD . . .	192
XX. A SINISTER DISCOVERY . . .	204
XXI. MORE SHOCKS FOR DILYS . . .	212
XXII. PHILIP IS SHADOWED . . .	225
XXIII. THE CHIEF CONSTABLE IS ANNOYED . . .	234
XXIV. PHILIP GAINS TIME . . .	243

	PAGE
CHAPTER	
XXV. THE SECOND DISAPPEARANCE . . .	251
XXVI. WHAT PHILIP TOLD DILYS . . .	259
XXVII. HOW DILYS BELIEVED . . .	271
XXVIII. THE CHIEF CONSTABLE IS NOT SATISFIED .	280
XXIX. PHILIP SCORES AGAIN . . .	287
XXX. IRMA TRIES TO HEDGE . . .	298
XXXI. "TO-MORROW AT HALF-PAST TWO?" .	311

## CHAPTER I THE BEAUTY OF GORCHESTER

THE sunshine of October, whose quality sometimes seems more mellow, more richly golden than that of summer, streamed through a high window of coloured glass upon the wide stone passage that leads from the new to the old part of Gorchester University.

It lit up the form of a singularly elegant young woman, not quite a girl, but in her early twenties, who was walking sedately along the corridor with a note-book and pencil in her hand.

Something in her air, in the carriage of her head, showed in a way not easy to define that this was not only the belle but the reigning queen of the present flight of undergraduates. Her burnished hair of a warm chestnut brown shaded a face of perfect proportion lit by eyes of what Christina Rossetti calls "dangerous grey." They were in fact of the tint that rapturous novelists are apt to describe as violet, and were ringed with black lashes. Her complexion was of that flawless texture which is the despair of the average girl. She wore her clothes admirably and her movements were graceful.

This paragon—Irma Varick by name—ascended a flight of steps and came to narrower passages and a less ambitious building. She walked a good way along, turning several times, and finally pushed open the door of a large lecture-room, wherein a man in college gown and hood stood upon one of those small platforms which artists call "thrones," with a long wand in his



hand, discoursing to a large and attentive class of students of both sexes—male predominant—upon the various theories—Heisenberg, Dirac and so on—of the “continuum” of four dimensions.

“Sir James Jeans has told us——” he was saying, when the door opened and Miss Varick walked in. She made no unnecessary noise, but, on the other hand, there was nothing furtive about her entry—no attempt to slip in silently. Closing the door with deliberation she took her place in the second row, a seat therein having been left apparently for her.

The lecturer paused. He was a noticeable man, and most of the girl students raved about him. His age was round and about thirty; and as he towered over his class, his height and massive build made him singularly impressive. His light brown hair stood up vertically from his broad brow. His features were rough-cut but dignified and his eyes deepset under a brow with a habitual slight frown.

“Good morning, Miss Varick. Are you aware that you are seven minutes late, and that your lateness is disturbing both to the class and the lecturer?”

Miss Varick looked up quickly. It seemed that she was totally unprepared for the temper of this reproof. Nevertheless she replied with perfect composure.

“Sorry, Professor, but I shall have to be late every week. Dr. Strom never leaves off until the full hour, and I have to walk from the Central Lecture Hall all the way here. Perhaps I had better not attempt to attend this class any more?”

The face of the irate man changed and grew anxious —almost apprehensive. “I am, as you know, always willing to accept a reasonable statement,” he muttered hurriedly. “Come as near to time as you can in future ; and meanwhile perhaps Ord will let you see the notes—if any—that he has taken.”

With a smile that was barely a smile at all but conveyed to Garrie Ord, who sat next her, exactly the degree of mocking amusement that she intended, Miss Varick took up her pencil, opened her note-book and sat ready to hear the views of Minkowski on relativity.

The smile was by no means lost upon the lecturer, and some of his aplomb disappeared.

The tones of his fine, resonant voice were less assured for the next few minutes, and his class, which he usually held spellbound, showed slight signs of inattention and restlessness.

Miss Varick was a model of behaviour. She sat quite still, except when she took notes, and neither whispered nor smiled.

When the lesson was over she rose at once, with a kindly nod to Garrie Ord, and passed from the room in company with another girl whose irregular features and shining eyes were attractive but whose clothes were woefully shabby.

“Come and have lunch with me, Dil,” murmured the beauty, slipping her hand through the other’s arm.

“A word with you, Miss Varick, if you please”—Professor Armitage spoke imperatively—“upon the



opening paragraphs of this lecture, which you missed."

He turned his back upon the two girls, reascending his rostrum, and fumbling the leaves of his notes.

Something in his voice perhaps warned Irma to avoid a clash. "Wait for me—in fact, I command you to wait," she whispered, pinching the arm of Dilys Pendered; and turned back, strolling through the now empty room up to where Armitage stood. There was on her face no expression save one of polite enquiry.

Armitage flung himself down in his chair, the small table being between them, and pushed a sheet of paper towards her. "Do you suppose," he muttered thickly, "that I am going to put up with this?"

The girl buckled on her armour of innocent unawareness. One glance at the paper showed her that it was blank and was put forward only as a blind.

"Phil," cooed she softly, "what on earth do you mean? Not even for you will I race madly along corridors, arriving breathless to catch your first utterance. You ought to be grateful to me for attending this lecture at all. I only did it to please you. It's not in my curriculum, as you well know. Not my subject at all—*world lines*—and foul stuff like that! I don't understand half of it."

He leaned forward and his low voice shook with his effort to keep from shouting. "That devil Strom . . . putting pressure of some kind on you. Don't contradict! Think I can't see for myself?"

Irma's whole figure became taut, as though an electric

shock had been administered. Her face scarcely changed its expression, but the colour forsook it. Under his relentless eyes she suddenly grew perfectly white.

"Phil, you're mad! *Dr. Strom!!* Why not the Principal himself? About as likely. Who has been making mischief? I have a right to know that. I *will* know!"

"Look me in the eyes and swear there's nothing in it?"

From fear she suddenly reacted to rage. "And who are you to take such a tone with me? *Look in your eyes indeed! And swear!* You're utterly impossible," she replied, her lowered tones giving the impression of a growl of fury. She clenched her hand upon the table—her back was towards the door, so this gesture was unseen by the waiting Dilys. "Where you got all this stuff I simply can't guess, but that's quite enough from you now. Dil Pendered's waiting for me, and she has none too much patience. Don't come near me again, please, till you've recovered your temper."

She swung round swiftly, yet not as one fleeing, and marched out of the room. Once outside the door, however, she caught her friend by the arm and hurried her urgently away.

But as she made her exit she could not hide her face from Dilys, and its pallor was startling. Never before had Dil seen Irma lose her poise, even for a moment, and what the kindly Professor could have said to shake her so badly was hard to imagine.



For the first moment as they hurriedly traversed corridors neither girl spoke, but very soon Irma had snatched at her usual composure and wrapped it about her once more. "For pity's sake come and lunch with me, gu-r-r-ll ! I shall go potty if I can't have a woman to talk to for a bit ! Fancy the poet prattling of ' the need of a world of men ' ! *Pas je !* I could do with an Adamless Eden for quite a long time, myself."

" Well, you don't seem able to get it," laughed her companion. " What's the good of my coming to lunch with you, with the telephone going half the time, and the various specimens of your menagerie arriving at the rate of one a minute, each provided with his own lunch and only praying to be allowed to feast his eyes on you while he's eating it ? "

" Bit hectic, isn't it ? " replied Irma with what sounded like a genuine sigh.

" Why not come and live at the Kittery ? " (the nickname for the largest of the girl-students' hostels). " You know it isn't at all bad ; and they couldn't pursue you there ? "

" Well, as a matter of fact, I *am* thinking of moving," said Irma hurriedly. " Want to consult you about that. Come along ; we'll keep 'em out somehow. Lock the door and hang out the placard ' Not at Home.' Don't be a cat, you haven't lunched with me for ages——"

She broke off, for they had descended the stairs and stepped out into the road, where they were at once confronted by a highly ornamental youth who seemed

to have been in ambush behind the door and now cried eagerly, "Where are you lunching, Miss Varick? Come with me to the 'Quick and Cosy'."

"No, thanks! Off with you! I'm engaged!"

"The devil you are! Who is he? Me for the suspension bridge! Oh, I see what you mean! Engaged to lunch! Well, let's book up to-morrow; I'm positive it's my turn——"

"Oh, *do* run away!" cried Irma, stamping her foot. "Let me alone; I've something better to do than to play round with you boys——"

The aspirant was dashed and fell back; but ten yards ahead the same formula was gone through with variations. They seemed to meet every man in the University, dons included, during the short passage they made up Cliff Street, which is too steep for trams, to the shop where Irma finally bought their lunch.

Presently it was Dr. Strom himself—"the Super-Strom" as he was called by all the students. He was the most unpopular member of the academic body, on account perhaps of his great ability, his arrogant temper, or his relationship to the powers that were.

He was the only man they met who made no attempt to stop them, passing with a slight bow and smile which included both.

Yet to Dilys, who was quick-sighted and perhaps psychic also, there was something menacing in his glance as it flickered over Irma—something that seemed to say, "Lucky for you that you are walking with a woman for once."

"Oh my, doesn't he own the earth!" muttered



Irma as he passed. "Come along. I've got lots of cash and this lunch is on me. We'll have oyster patties, *foie gras* sandwiches, grape-fruit, and coffee to follow! That do?"

Dilys made no demur, simply charging herself with various parcels. She knew Irma had plenty of pocket-money, whereas she had practically none, so she felt no undue sense of obligation, and they presently arrived at the house wherein Irma had her quarters in Houston Square.

The position of Miss Varick differed somewhat from that of the ordinary undergraduate. She was an orphan, and her parents had both died in London while she was in her second year at Westfield College. For a time she had gone to live with Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, an uncle and aunt in Kensington, but this was not a success. They had daughters of their own, and even the partiality of parenthood could not make Mrs. Bennett blind to the fact that her niece outshone Miriam and Kathleen as an electric bulb outshines a tallow dip. She was thankful when Irma—partly urged thereto by the advice of an uncle who was on the teaching staff of Gorchester University—decided to go thither and specialize.

Mrs. Gray, head of the women students' section, agreed with Professor Varick that it might be better to allow his niece somewhat more liberty than is possible in the case of girls in their teens, seeing that she was her own mistress and had already done very well in the London University. She was therefore permitted to take lodgings with a certain Mrs. Jenkins,

who was well known to the University authorities, and, beyond being obliged to put in so many dinners a week in the hostel to which she nominally belonged, she was able to go pretty much her own way.

This arrangement was justified by its results. Irma, in spite of her beauty and popularity, was a girl with brains and behaved circumspectly. She was by no means of the modern, sex-ridden type. The whole of that American idea which is embodied in what are known as "petting-parties" filled her with a cool, amused disgust.

Dilys breathed a sigh of relief when they had actually entrenched themselves in her pleasant rooms on the first floor.

"Now," said she, "as you are standing this lunch, it's up to me to make coffee and so on!"

In spite of the mild October, the fire which burned on the hearth was pleasant. Mrs. Jenkins and her daughter Etheldreda adored and spoiled their lovely lodger. The table had been laid already with loaf, butter, cheese and plates. Dilys searched in the cupboard for cups and saucers and busied herself in setting out the lunch they had brought in. All the time she was recalling Irma's white face as she marched to the door of the lecture-hall, away from Professor Armitage—that dear, wonderful, kindly Philip Armitage; what *could* he have said to upset her like that?

It must be owned that the solicitude felt by Dilys concerned itself almost wholly with Armitage and very little with the gay and careless Irma. The daughter



of the impecunious Welsh parson was getting through her own training at express speed, so as to be able to help in the launching of younger brothers and sisters. Affairs of the heart had no place in her curriculum ; but in the depths of her being lay the ideal of Philip Armitage as of the one man in her life who was likely to count.

She bore Irma no grudge because Philip loved her, as most of the students felt certain was the case. Her fear was lest the acknowledged beauty should be playing with the devotion of such a man. Had it been Armitage who had turned white as death after the exchange of a few sentences it would not have been surprising, although it would have been a cause for anxiety. But why should Irma have looked so—as if Philip had struck her to the heart?

There was no overt engagement between those two ; nevertheless it was widely believed that an understanding existed between them. Had he broken it off? Fiercely—brutally—with one word? . . . Hardly. Would she have taken it like that? For a moment or two Dilys had detected, or thought she had detected, sheer terror upon that lovely face. Terror caused by something Armitage had said? It did not seem possible ; and she could not help hoping that during lunch Irma would say or do something to enlighten her.

She seemed gay enough at the moment. She had been as good as her word, locking the door and hanging outside it the legend “Not at Home.”

When, about ten minutes after their sitting down

to eat, the telephone rang, Dilys rose to answer it, as she often did for the lazy Irma ; and was a little startled when the latter sprang to her feet, saying hurriedly, " No, thanks, Dil. I'll answer it myself. It may be—— I was expecting——"

She held the receiver to her ear and an odd look of relief stole over her exquisite features. " Oh, it's you, is it ? "

## *CHAPTER II THE PENALTIES OF POPULARITY*

AS is well known, it is to the Strom family that the University of Gorchester owes its fine buildings and lavish endowments.

One Nicholas Strom, a native of the city, having amassed in commerce a colossal fortune, and being (unlike most commercial men) a person of intellectual tastes, decided to erect with his vast wealth a seat of learning which should be the wonder of the west and might, in days to come, rival the ancient universities, cramped as they are by small space and having overgrown their borders.

No one standing in the vast hall, with its panelling, challenging the glories of old city companies, and its inwrought symbolism of design, can help admitting that this man built for the future. He was a dreamer, an idealist.

The only brother of the said Nicholas, himself an



intellectual, chose schoolmastering as his profession, and made no more than a provision for his old age, having an only son who, becoming a coach at Cambridge, likewise amassed no wealth. To this latter it was thus a source of much gratification that Claud, his only son, should come down from his father's university first Senior Wrangler, and be elected entirely on his own merits to a Chair in the family university, of whose council he was speedily made a member. In fact, it seemed only too likely that he would go on and become one day Principal of Gorchester.

Unfortunately, Claud Strom was unpopular, alike with his colleagues on the College staff and with his pupils.

He was irritable, sarcastic, solitary, and made no friends.

One of his manifold interests was botany in all its aspects ; another was archæology. Both these he pursued in his leisure hours, always alone ; either roaming the remoter districts of the Quantocks or the Mendips, or visiting Glastonbury, Tintern, Cleeve, or the hundreds of other ruins of the west. Although his own subject was classics, and he followed archæology merely as a hobby, he was achieving a reputation therein by his vacation work, and could already write F.S.A. after his name. He always left Gorchester immediately upon the close of one term and never returned to it until the beginning of the next. During his vacations his name would sometimes appear in the papers as one of a distinguished party at Ur, or in

Egypt. Sometimes nobody at all would have any idea of his whereabouts or what he was doing.

He lived in comfortable, even luxurious rooms, waited upon by a bachelor manservant named Pratt, who was also his chauffeur, and therefore universally known as the "Motor Spirit."

Two or three times a term he gave a select dinner-party, at which his guests were such eminences as Gorchester provided; the lord lieutenant of the county, the bishop of the diocese, Lord Estramere, the local magnate, or some distinguished traveller passing through.

But few members of the teaching staff were ever invited to these feasts, and most often there were no ladies. No unmarried woman had ever been Strom's guest, so far as was known.

There had, however, been one encounter between this remote exclusive being and the Gorchester divinity, Irma Varick. If her account of it were true, the gentleman had come off second best.

Professor Varick was almost the only member of the University who could be called a friend of Claud Strom; and it was at a dinner given by him and his wife that the meeting had taken place. An account of it had been given to Dilys by Irma herself, who evidently relished the memory of it.

"It was rather sport! You see, Auntie gave me to him to take in to dinner, and apparently he considered this a mortal affront, for he was in a very bad temper—at least, I suppose he was—he can't always be as disagreeable as that. At first he made no effort



to talk, just sat there glowering, so I turned to the dear fat old dean on my other side and talked about the college sports. Strom's demeanour had been so pointedly rude that I was determined not to speak first, but at last he remembered his manners and asked me stiffly and coldly if I had ever been to Rome? I told him I had had a year at the British School at Rome, which seemed to surprise him, though I don't know why it should. After he had succeeded in assimilating the idea, he presently wanted to know what I thought of Rome as a whole—how it had struck me. I said that I rather agreed with the undergrad. in 'Amours de Voyage'—'Marble I thought thee and brickwork I find thee.' He could hardly conceal his amazement—in fact, he didn't try—at this unlooked-for sign of intelligence in a female. He stared at me as if I were a performing dog, and jerked out, 'You read Clough?' 'Why, has the Censor been banning him or anything?' says I blandly. He looked annoyed. 'Simply, you are the first woman I have met who does read him.' 'Oh, don't say that,' was my retort, for I was a bit stung at his asinine conceit; 'it gives one such a discouraging idea of your lady friends.' After that I think he would have stood by cheerfully to see me burn at a slow fire. . . . However, happily Garrie Ord was there and had brought his banjo——"

"What! Garrie brought his banjo to Professor Varick's house?"

"By special command, if you please! So I sang and he vamped an accompaniment, and the whole

company rose to us—all except the Super-Strom, who sulked in a corner. Everybody told my aunt and uncle they didn't know when they had so enjoyed an evening ; but I don't suppose the great man will ever speak to me again ! ” . . .

Nobody knew for certain whether he ever had. That was the curious thing. Yet they must have met—somewhere—for they were on terms. Upon the very rare occasions on which the Super-Strom put in an appearance at the Debating Society or the Students' Conversazione, they spoke to one another, albeit so briefly and inconspicuously that it would have been unremarked had not Miss Varick been the only feminine student distinguished by his notice.

Their passing in the street that morning—the meaning she deemed herself to have caught in his look—came back to the mind of Dilys, unwilling though she was to encourage scandalous thoughts.

When Irma insisted upon going herself to the telephone, she said, rising from table, “ Shall I slip into the next room ? ”

“ Nonsense ! Stay where you are,” replied Irma with a stamp of her foot. “ It's only Armie.” Then, speaking into the telephone, “ Well, what is it ? ” . . . A longish interval, during which she listened to some lengthy explanation ; after which, wrathfully, “ I should think so, indeed ; but, for all that, I don't want to see you or talk to you. . . . No ! . . . No ! ” . . . Another long interval ; then as one half relenting, “ Well, perhaps ” . . . sharply and suddenly, “ No, on no account. Here would be better



—the usual thing. . . . Oh, well, then, if you raise so many objections, drop the whole idea. I can't manage it, so that's that ! . . . Here or nowhere. . . . Yes. . . . Eight o'clock. Got another appointment at nine, so be punctual. Take it or leave it. . . . Right you are. Good-bye."

Without a second's delay she hung up the receiver, wiped the mouthpiece with a dainty handkerchief and remarked, "I tell you straight, as Etheldreda says, I've touched the limit. If this kind of thing is to go on any longer I shall take the veil ! Not sure I won't do it now. Such a safe way out, wouldn't it be ? The authorities at the convent would take all responsibility off my shoulders and nobody could get at me . . . only I don't expect they'd allow me detective novels to read in bed. . . . That *would* be a serious disadvantage."

"Irma, you are a prize idiot."

"So would you be if you had had to go through what I have ! And what does it all amount to ? Oh, I know I have a beautiful face and a white, shapely body. I should be dishonest if I said I don't know it. But what is it going to do for me ? I'm not likely to make half such a happy marriage as you, who will be married for the qualities of your mind and heart, more than for your bodily charms, though I'm not saying you're without those too. Grant that mine's a face to launch a thousand ships—even aeroplanes—but what will it be worth twenty years hence ? What would it be worth now if, for example, I had smallpox ?"

"You've got the hump, my dear," said Dilys, speaking more calmly than she felt. Rising from table she collected the cups and plates and piled them ready for Etheldreda to carry away later. After a long pause of indecision, "I hope you haven't quarrelled with Armie?" she risked.

"Not if he behaves himself," snapped Irma, pushing over her cigarette-case. She lit one with deliberation. "I'm not going to marry him, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, but haven't you encouraged him to think you might?"

"No, I haven't"—coolly. "Hang it all, my dear, as I just now had the honour of pointing out to you, my face ought to be the means of getting me *something*, if not everything; and as it won't last, I'm going to dispose of it to my own advantage, while it is called to-day. Once I am settled I shall then feel free to do the things I really like. Because, little as you may think it, my dear—'believe me or believe me not,' once more to quote the unique Jenkins family—I don't really like all this fuss, and these endless men tagging after me. I've got brains—of a sort—and I came to the College to learn. Now the conclusion is being forced on me that I could learn better if I were married; only it must be to a man who'll give me my head—and also money enough to enable me to do the things that interest me. Oh, look severe, but it's common sense, my dear! . . . Can you see me with a general servant, pushing a pram?"

"Perhaps not," said Dilys, evidently giving the

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subject her careful consideration. "We can't judge you, we girls of the rank and file."

"Don't know I'd call *you* that exactly," murmured Irma, eyeing her critically. "You know, Dil, I often think you're rather choice. What I'd love is to see you properly dressed. I say! I'm going to risk hurting your feelings—to ask you to do something for love of me—only it may put your back up?"

"Risk that. Shoot!"

"Well, I've got a couple of frocks that are out of my line. They were so seductive I couldn't help buying them, and I told myself that I could get away with anything I chose to wear. But I can't. They're not me; but they would be you. I know it. They're brand-new, and I want to give them to you. Will you have 'em, or are you about to arise and smack my face?"

Dilys coloured hotly. "If it's really true that you don't want these frocks—if you're not just kidding me into taking a present from you—I'm more likely to kiss you than to smack your face. We're almost exactly the same height, and I've been wondering how on earth I was going to acquire anything to wear this term."

"Pendered, you're the nicest girl in college! I can't give them to you here and now, but I'll send Etheldreda along with them some time to-morrow. I'm going away for the week-end and have to catch an early train."

"What—*again*? You were away last week-end, weren't you?"

Irma fixed her gaze on the fire. "M-yes, so I was. It's so convenient not to be here at week-ends. I don't have to refuse half a dozen invitations to play tennis or drive or skate."

"Some truth in that. Where are you going?"

"To what Etheldreda and her ma call a 'relative.' Correct word, by the way. 'Relation' means nothing at all. Anyway, Miss Prunes-prism, I assure you it's perfectly propah."

Dilys laughed. "I don't doubt it. No need for you to make yourself cheap," she commented.

"Meanwhile, you can console Armie. Hold his hand nicely. Shall I tell him you'll skate with him in the afternoon to-morrow?"

"Oh, are you seeing him before you go?"

She had the mischievous pleasure of seeing the lovely carmine whip into Irma's face. "I may," she said shortly.

"I hope you will. He's such a good sort. Don't make him unhappy."

"Good lack! His happiness isn't in my hands, and never was. He only thinks so. I'm going to talk to him like an aunt, and if he won't hear reason I shall be forced to take the veil, as I remarked before. He can't say he wasn't warned."

Dilys looked unhappy. "Irma, you're not careful enough," she said. "I don't believe he has been warned. I believe you're engaged to him, and now you're going to turn him down flat——"

"Child, remember what I told you about the pram. If I were to marry Phil that would be my lot. I've



got a few hundred per ann., he's got his post here. If ever we did have any money to speak of it wouldn't be for years and years. The corollary is painfully obvious. Before we'd been two years married I should have bolted with the next man and left him the baby to hold."

Dilys bit her lip. She looked worried. "Well, if I'd promised Armie that I'd marry him, and wished to let him know that I was jilting him, I don't think I'd dare face him. I'd write. Safer."

Irma wriggled. "No good at all. He'd simply insist on an interview. He always thinks he can shout anybody down. If I must own the truth, I'm not at all overjoyed at the thought of the coming fray; but I—I sort of feel I owe it to him. I've given him a rotten deal, poor lamb, and I feel it's up to me to let him break loose on me if he wants to."

"He has a devil of a temper," remarked Dilys dryly.

"How do you know, I wonder?"

"I know, because I was born with eyes and the capacity to judge," was the calm reply. "Also, one evening quite lately, when I came back into College for a book I had left behind, I overheard a most royal row going on in one of the labs—two men quarrelling. . . . I'm sure one was Armie—he was letting himself go, and no mistake!" . . .

"And the other?"

"I've no idea. Armie had the stage."

"Where were they? Whose lab?"

"I rather think they were in the Staff Common Room. It sounded so serious that I was tempted to

go and call Groggs" (the students' nickname for the College porter), "but I decided it was none of my business and probably sounded worse than it was. So I went my way and left them to it."

"Well, but he was argufying with a man then; you don't suppose he would talk to me like that? If he did, he'd be sorry he was ever born."

Dilys sprang up. "Irma, I know you can't help being—well—like you are. But for pity's sake don't go in for *enjoying* to see a man suffer! There's so much in you that's good, I can't bear to think of you torturing a defenceless victim."

"Tut-tut, girl, that's rant," said Irma shortly. "I know I've been a beast to Phil, and I'm going to tell him I'm sorry. In fact, I'm about to reform. You'll see—from to-day on, I shall be a different girl." She paused, then added with a flash of malice, "If it were anyone else than Phil I somehow don't think you'd be quite so warm, my lady!"

Dilys took that thrust undaunted. "I like him, in spite of his temper. We've always been good friends. But it is true that if it were anyone else I should not be so anxious, because Phil is so touchy and apt to lose his head. If he does—if he gives you a good shaking—I shall think you deserve what you get. He's not a man you can play with."

Irma looked uneasy. "I've found that out," she muttered. "I—I won't let him take me very far." . . .

"You're going in his car?"

"Really now, what alternative plan for a heart-to-heart talk can you suggest? You know it's against



rules to have the men about of an evening, except when one gives a party and has special leave from the Kestrel" (slang name for Miss Hawke, of the Kittery). "Of course, he never drives to the door. He goes to the dark side of the square and waits, and I watch a chance to slip out when nobody's passing."

"Then you've done this before?"

"Oh, yes. Several times." . . .

### CHAPTER III      GARRIE GOES STAR-GAZING

CLASSES were over for the day and almost all the students had left the College; but there was still a light in that corner of the old Organic Chemistry Lab. which Dalton, the Professor, had assigned to Garrie Ord and his works.

The young man was absorbed in the experiment slowly maturing under his dexterous hands, far too interested to leave it; and yet half his heart was not there but away up on the high ground, far beyond the aeroplane factories, out in the open country above the estuary where stood on Welwych (pronounced Wellitch) Moor an old dismantled windmill which contained a telescope. . . .

The sun was sinking in a perfectly cloudless sky, and that night there would be no moon. . . . What a night for star-gazing!

Whither would his eager mind lead him finally?

These adventurous sciences wherein man seemed to be hovering always on the edge of some epoch-making discovery—which of them would claim him in the end?

Light—heat—life——

And the puny efforts of one man—one man who could not even hope to master one subject!

“Funny thing that,” he mused, as the water dripped from the mouth of a small pipe into the meticulously clean ware sink. “Moment you start in to try and do real work—work that counts—you find that life’s not nearly long enough, even for that one thing!” He raised his eyes—eyes long-lashed enough to be a girl’s—to the window beyond which the skies were slowly and splendidly beginning to darken. “If only I could whizz off to Armie’s windmill I could train his telescope on Centauri I—but I’ve got to finish this job first; and, moreover, I forgot to ask him for his key. All the same, think I’ll run up there in the car after supper, on the chance of finding him. Oh, blow! He told me he was out to dinner, or after dinner, somewhere to-night, so he did.”

With a shrug of his shoulders he bent his handsome young head once more above his work.

Garrie Ord was volatile and sometimes erratic, but he was also brilliant, and his university hoped great things from him.

He was a cousin of Dilys Pendered, and his father, a solicitor in Shrewsbury, had hoped that his elder son would follow him in the same line. Garrie, however, during his whole career at the fine old school in



what the Americans would describe as his "home town," persisted in carrying off all the prizes for "stinks," and the head master had at last persuaded Mr. Ord to let his promising son follow his bent.

In spite of his headlong spirits and athletic tastes, Garrie had extraordinary patience and a great capacity for taking pains ; so long only as they allowed him to whistle while he worked. If, on passing along the corridor in the old buildings wherein he laboured, one heard the strains of his singularly sweet notes, one might be fairly sure that he was wholly absorbed in some ticklish experiment, upon whose failure or success he might build a theory.

Dalton, his chief in chemistry and physics, and Armitage, his chief in mathematics and astronomy, both gave him special privileges. Dalton allowed him the sole use of that portion of the laboratory where he was now at work ; and Armitage let him handle his own fine and delicately adjusted telescope, upon which he had lavished far more money than he could afford, and which no other student might touch in the absence of its owner.

With a glance at the clock and a start as he saw the time, Garrie brought his experiment successfully to an end ; and the result was interesting. As he was poring over it, Dalton came in quickly.

"There you are, Ord ! Thought I heard you ! I've run in to ask you to do something for me to-night. The Principal wants me to dine with him at eight, to meet Streeter of London University—you'll have heard of him ? Big gun in astronomy. He's on his way to

Lisbon to attend that conference to which we are sending Strom as our representative. It's an invitation I can't well cry off; but just look at the sky! We're going to have such a night for observation as doesn't come often in England. I was wondering whether you were going up to Welwych Moor to-night to use Armitage's telescope?"

Garrie grinned sympathetically. "I know what's biting you, sir—that last photo from Mt. Wilson Observatory! Marvellous, isn't it? Rum you should come and ask me to go, when I'd been kicking myself because I forgot to beg Armitage for his key. You've got one of your own, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have; but surely Armitage himself will be up there to-night?"

"He won't, as I happen to know. Got a date, he told me."

"Pish!" said Dalton with an air of disgust. "Do talk English, Ord, and cut out this American slang." But the shadow on his face was caused by something deeper than Garrie's mischief. He felt, as did many others, that Armitage was involved in an affair which in Dalton's view was altogether hopeless, and that it was spoiling him. Reluctantly he drew a long-stemmed latch-key from his pocket and handed it to his pupil. "Take care of it, you young scamp. If that were mislaid I should never be forgiven."

"Leave it to Psmith—I won't let you down," replied Garrie, pocketing the key, "and sit down a minute while you tell me exactly what it is you want." Dalton handed him a mathematical formula—a most



cryptic looking document—but Garrie apparently understood it.

“If the night stays clear,” the Professor remarked, “I believe the lens at Welwych is good enough to verify most of this.”

Garrie nodded, and whistled happily as he folded the paper and placed it in his pocket-book. He could see what Dalton was after, and it was not exactly what he himself wanted. His own little bit of exploration seemed unappropriated.

“Right!” he pronounced. “If one of these beastly river fogs isn’t waiting round the corner, I’ll do my best for you, sir.”

“I don’t doubt it—unless some of the lads of the village get hold of you before you reach the wind-mill——”

“Don’t you worry. None of ’em about to-night. Joyce Clarke’s got a beano, and I’m not in her set,” responded Garrie, with a twinkle.

“Don’t tell me you weren’t invited!”

“N-no, I won’t tell you that,” was the inconclusive answer. “Well, sir, as you are here, have you got five minutes to look at this?”

“I haven’t got one,” grumbled Dalton; nevertheless he suffered himself to be led to where the result of the experiment lay in a glass saucer among the wonderfully clean and orderly paraphernalia; and was so interested that he stayed a quarter of an hour and then dashed off, cursing Garrie for detaining him.

When he had gone, his pupil, after having tidied

and put away everything with meticulous care, took off and hung up his white overall. He then locked the laboratory door, charged down the stairs and set off at a run for Majendie Terrace, the home of his aunt, with whom he boarded. She was an energetic and highly educated woman, keen on science and proud of her nephew. They got on excellently together.

One of Miss Ord's many virtues was that, believing as she did in Garrie's brilliance, she never complained when he came in late, as was the case that night. She knew that he would not keep her waiting but for his work's sake. While nobly refraining from anything that seemed like prying, her habit was to let him see that she was interested to hear anything that he chose to tell her of his doings. She was an intelligent listener, for she herself had been, thirty years before, an undergraduate, and loved Gorchester with all the fervour of a native who has seen the old place grow and blossom forth into importance.

Garrie told her gleefully that he had the key of the windmill, a fact which did not surprise her, in view of the beauty of the night. He suggested that Aunt Aggie might accompany him in his star-gazing, as once or twice before she had done. She declined with regret, as it was her debating society evening and she was booked to discuss the intellectual level of women, a subject of much interest to her. While he brought out his two-seater she cut some sandwiches for the observer of the heavens, and filled a thermos flask with excellent coffee in case he was detained late.



It was half-past eight when he set out, and he ran across the Downs, skirting the city, and before long was leaving it behind him and mounting above and beyond it.

The sky as it darkened was ever more thickly powdered with stars "from marge to blue marge." As his little car topped rise after rise, and the vastness of the horizon widened out into sight, he experienced the slight vertigo which sometimes grips one when one seeks to thrust one's head into the heavens; a threat of insecurity—as if the smallness of the world made one unsafe—as though one stood on the verge of a precipice into which one might drop for ever and never light upon a resting-place.

He began to whistle a phrase from an anthem :

Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? . . .  
Thou madest him for a little while lower than the angels . . .

And straightway the thought of angels suggested to his sound and uncorrupted heart the image of a girl—the only girl who had ever strayed into the orbit of his untouched passions, Dilys Pendered, the daughter of his mother's cousin.

He thought she was like a Burne Jones angel. There was about her a suggestion of untrodden ways—of closeness to nature. . . . He could always picture her with bare feet, long-limbed and lissome, moving among trees, in the dawn. . . .

He checked his thoughts, for he was rather stern with himself where girls were concerned. He wanted to give all his heart at that time to the science that

he wooed ; but by a correlation of ideas he began to recall the scene that morning in class—the silly little episode of Irma Varick's late arrival and the Professor's disproportionate display of temper about it.

“ Hope old Armie won't go off the deep end about a minx like Irma,” he thought. “ Full of monkey tricks she is ; and it's my belief she's leading him on.”

Why had he jumped down the throat of his favourite pupil like that before the whole class ? Now that Garrie came to think it over, he had remarked a singular unevenness of temper in old Armie of late. And, like the rest of the little world of Gorchester, he had no hesitation in assuming that Irma was at the bottom of it.

It seemed curious, but so it was. Armitage was by no means the fellow one would have picked for Irma. If it had been Backhouse, for instance—or Palmer—good-lookers both of them. However, there it was ; and, that being so, why couldn't they give out the engagement and have done with it ? Then they could get married in the Christmas vacation and return next term comparatively sane, and ready to give their attention to really serious work once more. Rotten wheeze, falling in love at the University, where every one had their searchlights trained upon you, and where there were so many other things to do.

He was thankful to be free of all that kind of thing. In spite of which, as signs of the city were left behind and he wound ever higher into the magic night, he was flooded with the thought of how grand it would be if Dilys were sitting there beside him.



Her image floated before his mind's eye—tall and pale, her face all lit up with those eyes that spoke. She was so funny, such a mass of contradictions. So learned and yet with no more experience of the world than a little child of seven. Never, he would be prepared to swear, had Dilys given the glad eye to anyone. How long would she remain unawakened? He knew that he wanted to be the one to awaken her.

The miles slipped by, engrossed as he was in these thoughts. Garrie was a man whose car was always in perfect going order. Because she was a Singer and because she was a Peach, he called her *Pêche Melba*. She was far from new, but she ran, as he said, like a filly, because he and she understood each other.

On Welwych Moor the old sailless windmill stood out opaque as a black velvet silhouette against the transparent star-powdered darkness of space. It stood on the very summit, ready to catch every wind that blew. There was talk of a permanent observatory being built there by the College; but meanwhile Armitage had stepped in, rented the mill, and installed his own instrument.

He had instructed Garrie never to leave his car before the gate during his visits at night, as he had once or twice been disturbed himself by a thoughtless acquaintance, who, driving past, seeing the car and deducing his presence therefrom, had knocked on the door begging to be allowed a peep.

The *Pêche Melba* therefore was driven past the mill and off the grass-bordered road on the left, at a point whereat a little wood came down to the very verge

of the tarmac. There Garrie ran her in under the trees, where she could not be seen from the road, and himself got out, lifting his case full of papers and such. He was just about to cross the way, slantingly towards the little wooden wicket, when he heard the purr of an approaching car.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE OLD MILL

WHEN Garrie perceived a car approaching, he halted where he was, not from any desire to spy, but simply in order to allow the travellers to pass without seeing him.

It was a closed two-seater, and to his momentary surprise it stopped at the gate of the mill.

Why, of course, it was Armitage himself. He must have cut short his evening's engagement because the splendour of the night tempted him beyond bearing.

Anyhow, there he was, unfolding his long, powerful frame from the small car in a way that always reminded Garrie of unfolding a camera tripod. Hugely pleased, the pupil was just about to run across the road and shout, when he saw that Armitage was handing out a lady.

Garrie had practically no doubt who it was, although there was not light enough to be certain ; but Irma's voice betrayed her. She had one of those warbling



voices, speaking always on a singing note, which was unmistakable. He could not hear what she said, but he gathered that she was expostulating. After she had left the car, she stood detaining Armitage on the road for a while, as if in argument. He was evidently, in his usual manner, insisting peremptorily upon having his own way.

She did not hold out long. In a minute or so she passed through the gate which her escort held open for her, and began to ascend the little outside stair, hardly more than a railed ladder, which led from the ground to the room on the first floor of the mill. Armitage, just behind her, put his arm over her shoulder, inserted his key, pushed open the door and both vanished into the pitch-dark interior.

Garrie stood there, considerably taken aback. He had never known the Professor to bring a girl student alone to the mill, although several times various members of his astronomy class had been there. "Wonder if he expected to find me up there? Could he have seen Dalton? He knew I hadn't the key," he was busily considering.

They had probably been out for a drive, and the temptation to take an observation in view of the gloriously favourable weather must have been too much for Armie. Irma, it seemed, was more prudent than he. . . . But, anyway, there they both were, as much alone together as if they had been on a desert island.

Garrie was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that his own company could not be desired.

"... Though I could go up to the observatory and leave 'em to it, as far as that goes," he reflected. But in a very few seconds he had decided that he was not equal to "barging in" upon them.

"Of course, no doubt, they're engaged and what-not. It's perfectly all right. But somehow I don't fancy Armie would want me hanging round," was his final conclusion; having made which, he found himself faced with the necessity of clearing out that moment, if not sooner. He felt perfectly sure that, as soon as he had lit the lamps and seated Irma comfortably, Armitage would come back to put his car out of sight, according to his invariable custom; and Garrie deeply disliked the possibility of being found lurking there like a spy.

"Better fade into the landscape at once," thought he. "If I come back in an hour's time, ten to one they'll have gone. . . . Pretty mouldy for me, but it's the only way." . . . As he reflected he was busily pushing the little car out into the road, not a hard task, as the ground sloped downward, and once she had the road under her, with her nose pointed down the hill by the way they had come, she began to run by her own weight. Garrie hopped in and steered her gently down past the gate, his eye carefully fixed upon the mill door to see whether it opened. It did not, so far as he saw, and he had glided away for a good many yards before it was necessary to start his engine. Then he ran steadily on for about a mile, at which point there was a fairly good road to the left, leading towards the estuary. Along this he turned



and set himself to cover distance. A few seconds after he had left the tarmac he heard the engine of a swift, powerful car ascending the steep hill behind him in low gear, and wondered vaguely whether its occupants would see Armie's car, stop, and beg to be given a peep at the mysterious universe ; which would be awkward for the couple within !

He thought that he *did* hear it stop, but was by no means certain ; for the land humped itself and he had turned a corner which, as motorists know, cuts off sound with a singular abruptness.

He felt, as he would have said, a bit peeved at being frustrated in his hardworking intentions ; but soon the glamour of motion—slipping over the starlit plateau in utter solitude—captured his imagination. When his road dipped and he found himself in the valley he determined to make for Rose Crag, a curious geological formation overhanging the shore of the estuary.

There is no motor-road there, for the cliff edge is reckoned unsafe ; but many a picnic-party risks it over the grass in daylight ; and as soon as Garrie got there his reward was great, for the whole wide river-mouth and the soft black outline of the Welsh coast with its glimmering lights lay under him, the gem-like riding-lamps of tugs and trawlers vying with the white fire of the stars.

He was in luck. It is not often that the tide actually washes the base of Rose Crag ; but that night it was so. The sea was flooding in and for the past two days a strong west wind had been whipping up the waters.

There was no wind now, but he could hear the low, cooing suck of the tiny wavelets in the unseen depths below.

"I'll bring Dilys up here one night," he thought as he settled himself in comfort, attacked Aunt Aggie's sandwiches and drank her excellent coffee.

After this refreshment and a smoke, he thought he might begin his homeward turn, so set off once more and completed a thirty-mile round before returning to the mill, which he reached this time from the opposite direction.

Armitage's car was no longer there, neither could he see it in the usual parking-place. But there was not much light, and, before proceeding to park the *Pêche*, Garrie wanted to be quite sure of the departure of the couple. He felt uncomfortable, though he could hardly have told why. There was nothing outrageous, though there was something unusual, in the Professor's bringing a favourite pupil to do a little star-gazing. Only it was not like Armitage. If the two were secretly engaged, he was the man of all men whom Garrie would have expected to be punctilious.

The mill was furnished with tarred wooden shutters, so that lamps within were not visible from the road, unless one made a light in the observatory when the shutters were open for the telescope, in which case rays shot skyward like faint searchlights. It was certain that the telescope was not now in use. Then the lovers had been and gone and he might safely enter. Yet he meant to be even more sure before parking his car, which he left at the gate as he went



stumping, purposely audible, up the wooden stair, and rattled his key unnecessarily in the lock.

All within was dark and quiet, yet he felt it necessary to ask twice, in a loud voice, if anyone was there, before striking a match.

Never before had he felt nervous when coming alone to this ancient place. But this time he shut the door behind him with trepidation ; and in the succeeding darkness and silence he heard distinctly the noisy, hurried ticking of a cheap alarm clock which stood always upon a shelf against the wall.

The room he had entered was a large one and covered the whole of the circular interior. To his right there was a rudimentary staircase with a rail leading to the upper floor.

Armitage had furnished the place after a fashion as, during the summer months, he sometimes slept there in order to avoid driving home in the small hours, or to be near his telescope at critical moments.

A screen or two hid the farther end, where was a camp-bed with rugs and pillows. On the screens hung some wonderfully good photographs of stellar phenomena.

On the wall near the door was a paraffin lamp with a tin reflector. Garrie lit it, and the result threw a light over the scene, though not a strong one.

In addition to the fact that the clock was going there were one or two other traces of recent occupancy. An arm-chair had been pushed up to the table, on which stood a bottle of "Kia-ora," two tumblers and a crockery jug holding water. It looked as though

another chair—a light one—had been set at the other side of the table. If so, it had been pushed back very hastily, for it had tipped over backwards and only been prevented from falling to the ground by the support of a shaky old sofa which stood behind it, against which it was leaning crookedly.

Two cigarettes, neither of which had been more than half-smoked, lay in an ash-tray.

Garrie was conscious of embarrassment, as though he were gazing on intimacies. In fact, he felt like an intruder, an experience which had never previously been his in Armie's domain.

His tidy soul repelled by the sight of the tipped-up chair, he moved forward mechanically with the design of setting it on its legs. Owing to the dim light he failed to notice that one of the large, rough Indian rugs which lay about the floor had been badly rucked by some hasty foot. He tripped on it and came down on his hands and knees.

The fingers of his left hand, spreadeagled over the rug's dark surface, came into contact with sticky wetness. Somebody, he thought, must have spilt their orange-squash !

Sitting back on his heels, he drew out a handkerchief with his right hand and proceeded to wipe his fingers dry, realizing with a horrible start as he did so that the wetness was dark and sticky . . . dark red paint . . .

Paint, was it ?

Springing to his feet, he went to examine it, standing close under the lamp.



With a very odd reaction he felt certain that it was not paint at all. *It was blood*—and there was quite a lot of it, invisible in the dim light upon the dark maroon colour of the rug. There was also a smear on the knee of his grey flannel bags.

## CHAPTER V      WHAT HAPPENED THERE?

AS Garrie gazed at that Lady Macbeth hand which he held before him in the flickering light, his late sense of intrusion vanished completely. He thought it possible that he might have come in the nick of time, or else that (as was, alas ! more likely) he had arrived far too late.

It seemed to him that Armie, upon entering the mill, must have found some unsuspected marauder there.

He visualized the arrival of the two. Armie would have settled Irma in his most comfortable chair, brought out a drink for her, and then gone up the tower stairs to get ready the telescope. Meanwhile, the intruder hidden behind the screen made some inadvertent sound ; or, seeing a lovely girl left alone, perhaps appeared before her. Screams. Re-enter Armie, fuming like a dragon.

There could have been but one issue to the combat, for Phil Armitage had been heavyweight boxing champion of his college at Cambridge. Unless his antagonist had been armed ?

But that was not very probable. Almost certainly Armie had "tapped his claret" and then kicked him downstairs. The shock of the episode might have caused Irma to insist upon being taken straight home, in which case Armie might—probably would, after seeing her safely to Houston Square—return to the mill to clear up. Should Garrie let himself be found on the premises or not? This needed thought.

He had free leave to visit the mill. Armie was not in the least likely to cut up rough if he found him there—*unless* his presence should be for some particular reason unwelcome. True, he had seen two glasses and two chairs . . . but Armie could not know that he had likewise seen not only Irma and himself but also a perfectly genuine bloodstain.

The mind of Garrie Ord was in a curious state of bewilderment. As he stood there alone in the dim light he shivered, being visited by an indefinable sensation which to himself he described as "the creeps." It was as if something had just that moment left off happening; as if next instant it might start again; almost as if something unseen, unheard, were trying to get a message through to him, and that he ought to be able to hear these reverberations if he could be "tuned in" like a wireless.

Slowly he once more drew out his handkerchief. He knew the spots and smears thereon were not paint. Blood had been newly shed upon that rug. Whose?

It needed an effort to cross the room and open the large cupboard wherein cameras, tripods and so on were stored. He did so, however, with determination,



taking out his pocket-torch. Nothing there. Everything was in apple-pie order. With a shiver of apprehension he summoned his courage, and went to look behind the screens. The camp-bed was made up, but something in its aspect suggested that it had been opened. He put out a hand that shook and pulled back the coverlet. One horrified glance and he replaced it, stumbling away upstairs, sick and ashamed. When he reached the raftered stage whence the great sails had been torn, he carefully shot his beam of light into its depths of gloom, wherein often he had heard the rats scurrying. There were no rats that night, no sound. Dust lay thick and undisturbed everywhere. Lovingly he eyed the long barrel of the telescope and longed to fling open the shutters and swing it outboard. First, however, he must get back to the road and move the *Pêche* out of the way.

As he stepped forth into the open air, it suddenly occurred to him that he ought to go at once and find Armitage ; for surely Armitage could not know what had happened at the mill . . . or perhaps he had driven off for help, and to lay information with the authorities ? In much doubt as to what he ought to do, he decided to drive to Armitage's rooms and, if he could not be found, to go thence to the police station.

When he turned his eyes on the noisy little clock he had noticed with annoyance that it was nearly ten. He had lost more than an hour—more like an hour and a half—and soon Centauri I would be too low in the heavens for a good observation. Yet he was

very desirous of getting something, partly because it might be difficult to explain to Dalton the reason for his failure to do so. However, that could not be helped.

The *Pêche* was standing before the gate, her head pointing homewards. For some reason she would not start. He reflected that he had just run her pretty hard, and she might be short of oil. The bare idea of her seizing was too horrible for her devoted owner to contemplate, and he proceeded to oil her carefully before starting her afresh. As he set her going after this he heard what sounded exactly like the sound of a car being cranked up from the usual parking-place, and with a start he looked over his shoulder, thought he saw a glimmer of light among the trees, and proceeded to back a little way. He was going to see who was there. He was himself surprised at his own reaction of nervous excitement as he perceived a figure hastening, in a staggering kind of way, through the undergrowth towards him. The man came out upon the road, before Garrie had backed the *Pêche* far enough to be abreast of the light he had spied ; and he saw, to his utter bewilderment, that what he had at first taken to be a tipsy tramp looked like Armitage.

At the sight of his held-up hand Garrie stopped and switched on his headlights. It might have been the ghost of Philip, thirty years hence, so haggard and drawn was the white face that stared in at him. As they confronted one another he heard whistling breath as from exhausted lungs.



"Hallo," said he, in real sympathy but with true English paucity of diction. "What's up?"

"That you, Garrie?" The voice though hoarse was the voice of Armitage, and it was charged with relief. "Come to use the telescope?"

"That was the idea, sir, but I've been delayed. Ought to have got here sooner. What's wrong with you?"

"Wrong with me? Why, nothing at all, except that I've been wrestling with my 'bus, confound it!" was the carefully unconcerned reply, as Armitage wiped his hands with a bit of cotton waste. "Got here twenty minutes ago and thought I'd put it right straight off; but I find it's more serious than it looked, so I'll leave it till later."

Garrie felt so stupefied that he hardly knew what he said in reply. Armitage had told him a seemingly unnecessary lie. Presumably Irma was at that moment there with him in the car. Perhaps it was natural for him to wish to conceal the fact; but wouldn't it have been easier to confess that he had already been in the mill than to pretend that he had but just arrived?

"Want me to come and have a look at the 'bus?" he slowly asked, after a pause.

"No, thanks—light's bad, for one thing——"

"I could bring round the *Pêche* and turn her headlights on full——"

"Well, afterwards perhaps, we've none too much time now——" He was standing at the side of the car, almost as if to ensure that Garrie should not get out. "What is the time exactly?" he asked abruptly.

When Garrie told him he muttered in a surprised way, "So early? I thought it was much later. Much later . . ." For several moments he seemed lost in dreams, while Garrie's uneasiness revived strongly. Then, speaking suddenly as though forcing himself back with a jerk to the matter in hand, "Look here — Centauri I — I suppose that's what you're after?"

Garrie admitted it.

"Well, it doesn't set yet, you know. We've got a couple of hours. Good enough, eh? Come on, we'll swing her out at once."

"You're awfully good, sir, but aren't you too tired? I can manage her all right."

"Of course, I know that, but I want a look too. What d'you suppose I came up here for?"

"Quite," said Garrie politely. He could think of nothing else to say, he felt so completely nonplussed. Had he better mention that he had already seen Irma? Surely Armitage could not be intending to leave her out there alone in the car for a couple of hours? . . . And why was he in such a condition of dirt and exhaustion? . . . What had he been about?

It was not usual for young Ord to be conscious of nerves, but he felt at that moment so uncomfortable that for two pins he would have started the car and driven off. But he had done all he could—had tendered help, had offered to make himself scarce. Armie was apparently bent on star-gazing with him. So let it be.



“Run the *Pêche* in farther along there,” said Armitage, pointing. “Then hare along to the mill and get the door open.”

Turning away, he went lurching back towards the side of the road in the direction of his own car.

“Sure I can’t help you there, sir?”

“No, no. Shan’t be a minute. Got a pail of water here. Wash my hands,” barked he without turning his head.

As he rolled the *Pêche* gently upon the grass, Garrie succumbed to an overmastering temptation to listen—to make quite sure that Armitage was not speaking to anyone. He heard no sound at all but the splashing of water, which sounded so clearly that he thought he must have caught even a whisper. Slowly and most unwillingly he went back to the mill, re-entered it and relit the dim lamp.

He did not linger in the living-room, but went straight on up to the observatory, where he made the preliminary arrangements.

About ten minutes later he heard Armitage enter, so softly that it almost sounded as if he wished to be unheard. For a time he moved about in the living-room, as though he were straightening things. Subsequently he ascended the upper stairs and made his appearance. He had brushed his hair, was wiping his forehead with a clean handkerchief, and seemed altogether more like himself, though his breathing was still laboured, and he looked, as Garrie told himself, “all in.”

His first action was to take down a duster from a

hook and give the telescope a careful polishing. The light dust upon it showed Garrie clearly that, whatever Armitage and Irma had been about, they had not had out the spyglass.

"Cheer-oh!" he said, with an effort to be natural. "It's earlier than I told you. I took the time from your clock, without comparing my watch, and it's ten minutes fast."

Armitage stared at him. "What are you talking about? The clock downstairs isn't going at all. It's run down."

Garrie literally gaped.

"As it happens, it ran down just about the time you made it," said Armitage quite calmly. "How do you suppose it could be going? It's one of those cheap gadgets that need winding every day."

Surprise held Garrie mute. Here was another falsehood; for he could have taken his oath that when he first entered that room the clock was ticking. However, he could not give his professor the lie, so he replied, after a hesitation, "Well, I expect it's being approximately the right time gave me the idea that it was going."

In a state of most unusual mental confusion he pushed open the shutters, and then helped to polish the lens and make the various adjustments, as finally the great instrument was slung into position.

Soon the right field was in view, and the clearness proved astonishing. Both of the two enthusiasts began to lose sense of all else in the ecstasy of vision. They



fell to talking shop, and Armitage's breathing became calmer, his demeanour more like himself.

Garrie was able to do as Dalton had desired, and their work was cut short only by the fact that the object of their interest was sinking out of sight.

"I'd better run you home, sir, hadn't I?" he said, as they were putting things away.

"No, I'm not going home," was the surprising reply. "I shall bunk here. I often do, you know."

"Got any food?"

"Yes, thanks, I always keep some, and there's a tap in the yard. I can boil a kettle. Biscuits, bully-beef and coffee will do me well. I shall rise with the dawn and attend to the 'bus."

"Like me to drive up about eight or nine o'clock and give you a hand?"

"Certainly not. You've got plenty to do; but if you want to help me, could you, on your way to Dalton's twelve o'clock lecture, go to my digs and find out if I'm back. If not, it will mean that you must run out here and rescue me."

"I'll do all that with pleasure, sir. Can't I get the oil-stove going, or lay the cloth or anything?"

"Nothing, thanks. I brought a full bucket of water with me as I came upstairs, and that's all I'll need."

## CHAPTER VI THE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM

THUS rebuffed, Garrie took down his driving-coat from the peg and put it on, his gaze at the same time flashing round and noticing that the bottles and glasses had been put away, the chairs straightened and the clock stopped.

He sung out a cheerful "Good night and thank you, sir," and clattered down the wooden stair with anything but a cheerful heart.

"That chap's taken a knock, or I'm a Dutchman," he muttered to himself as he ran across the silent, vacant road. "But I don't see that there's anything I can do. What bothers me is, *Where is Irma?* What's he *done* with her? Had he just come back from running her home when I turned up? If so, why did he look as he did? Something wrong in that direction. Best of good chaps, Armie. But girls do play the devil, of course. Specially Irma. Expect she's given him the push, and he's gone crashing into some tree with his poor little 'bus because he couldn't see where he was going."

At the moment he did not remember that this explanation would not cover everything. The blood-stain, for example.

Up in the living-room Armitage made no movement until the sound of the *Pêche's* departure had died away. Then he stirred, sighed, lit the oil-stove, filled a large kettle and set it to boil.



Drawing a low chair near the stove he crouched down in it, holding his hands, which shook, to the warmth.

While Garrie was there he had pulled himself together and regained a certain amount of self-possession. But left alone he let himself go, and the expression on his rugged face was such as would have horrified his friends.

When the water showed signs of boiling he rose, took from a cupboard a large enamelled mug, a bottle of whisky and a tin of biscuits. These he put on a stool close by the stove so that he could once more crouch upon his low seat close to the warmth while he ate.

The hot refreshment seemed to give him some relief. He lit a pipe and sat ruminating and smoking, the tears trickling down his face unheeded as he did so.

Presently he rose, lit another small lamp, which he first trimmed with care, and then, holding it in his hand, went heedfully round the room, giving special attention to the floor. By this more powerful light could be seen what had been invisible in the dim radiance of the lamp by the door—namely, that the floor had been lately washed in one place. It was now quite dry, and the man fetched a clean duster and rubbed away as well as he could the marks of scouring which appeared upon the well-laid flooring-boards.

But the saturated portion in the maroon rug quite escaped him.

The blood had soaked in completely and did not glisten.

Rising from his knees he poured hot water into a bowl and washed his face, especially his nose and mouth, which seemed tender. Having changed the water for more from the kettle, he added boracic powder to it, and in this he placed his hands, having removed from one of them a dirty bit of bandage. When he had held them in the soothing solution for some minutes he wiped them on a towel which he had taken from a drawer, drew from his pocket a clean handkerchief, from which some strips had already been torn, and bandaged his hand afresh. At one side of his room there was a kind of half basin of zinc, with a pipe running from it through the wall and down outside, for the disposal of waste water. He poured away the water down this channel, carefully wiped the bowl and replaced it on the dresser. Then, noting that the cushions on the large chair which had stood by the table were tumbled and in disorder, he went to rearrange them. He took up one, patting it deftly, and laid it on the table. Then the other, and started as if an adder had bitten him.

The removal of the second cushion laid bare the seat of the chair, and upon it lay a dark, rectangular object about eight inches long by six wide. He stood back, the sweat breaking out anew upon his forehead, his eyes fixed in a stare of horror.

The thing was what is known as a pochette—a flimsy case of the kind used by girls to carry about trifles, and of the most inconvenient shape conceivable, being



perfectly flat, so that no object possessing any kind of bulk could be carried in it without so distending it as to make it impossible to close it.

This particular example was of black brocade with gold edging and delicate embroidery of flowers.

After gazing at it for a long time, as if the sight of it hypnotized him, Philip moved slowly forward and picked it up. He turned it over in his big, unsteady hands, as though he feared it might burn him. A very slight waft of orris-root perfume rose to his sensitive nostrils. The case had no bulge ; evidently it was empty, thought the inexperienced male.

A dreadful spasm writhed his features as he lifted the thing and held it against his cheek. He made a little moan of the kind a mother might utter when looking on her dead babe. Then he sank down upon the chair by the table, rested his face upon the pochette and so sat for a long, long time.

At last he appeared to have made up his mind. He rose to his feet, placed the thing in his pocket, then took down his driving coat and put it on. Next he carefully extinguished all lights, opened the door, locking it carefully behind him, went down the steps and crossed the road to where his car stood.

He listened. It was late and no sound came to him save the melodious cry of two little owls answering one another across the wood. All was as hushed as though no throbbing city of half a million inhabitants lay hidden within a few miles of where he stood.

He got into his car, pressed his foot on the starter and began to move at once with ease and precision.

If anything had been wrong with the two-seater, it was now most evidently rectified.

He set off, slowly at first, down the hill, taking the direction selected by Garrie earlier in the evening, and seeming as though he meant to return to Gorchester by way of the downs. But at the corner whereat Garrie had turned off he did the same thing, taking a road which led him down from the plateau along low ground until a little sleeping hamlet was reached on the very edge of the river mouth.

Through its narrow, winding street he crept as quietly as he could, seeing no lights, encountering no human creature. Beyond, the road mounted and continued to rise as he followed it, until he came, as Garrie had done, to the cliff called Rose Crag on account of the brilliant colour of its band of red marl.

Armitage, like Garrie, turned his car through an open gate and ran it over grass to the summit. There he alighted on the turf, and walked, with bent head and slow step, to the very edge.

A quite recent slip of the cliff had carried down the barbed wire which had at that point fenced the verge, leaving it sagging six feet or so below. The haggard man listened wistfully to the murmur of the brimming water below him in the darkness, invisible save where a touch of starshine flecked it here and there. In less than an hour the tide would be at full flood, and anything floating in the water would be carried down with incredible swiftness to the open sea.

Drawing forth the pochette from his coat he flung



it with a firm hand into space. He watched it fall—so still was the night that he even thought he heard it splash.

. . . Yes, there was water there, all right. A marvellous bit of luck.

His face was ghastly under the glimmering sky as he rose, went back to where his car stood, leaned into it and slowly dragged forth something bulky. . . .

Over the walnuts and wine at the Principal's excellent dinner-table that night Professor Dalton and the visitor from London were energetically discussing the planetary nebulæ, concerning which Professor Streeter held views which Dalton considered mistaken. The argument waxed hot—so hot that after a while the Principal discouraged it and they talked of other things ; but when, at a late hour, Dalton rose to depart, Streeter accompanied him to the door and exclaimed in wonder at the majesty of the stars.

“ Did you say you had access to a really good telescope ? ” he cried. “ Suppose it's nowhere near, so that we could get at it ? I should like to show you what I mean——”

Some discussion took place as to the feasibility of going up to Welwych Moor, but the Principal obligingly said he would leave the door open, and lent his guest a latch-key, upon which Dr. Streeter entered Dalton's car and they drove together to Majendie Terrace. Fortunately, Garrie, owing to his late return, was in the act of undressing and heard Dalton's somewhat diffident knock.

*See - Vol 2182.1*

He came down to the door, and in response to Dalton's request went upstairs and procured the key of the mill.

"But you won't really want it," said he, "Professor Armitage is up there, dosing down for the night."

"Oh, he'll let us in," said Dalton confidently. "We need not disturb him much; we can fix things for ourselves."

"'M yes," replied Garrie doubtfully. "I don't think Armitage is very well. Isn't it rather a pity to disturb him? He's managed to disable his car somehow and seemed very worked up about it."

Dalton explained the importance of Dr. Streeter, and was of opinion that Armitage would be only too pleased to have a chance of meeting so distinguished an authority, especially in view of his somewhat heretical opinions concerning planetary nebulæ.

Garrie said no more, but wished them good night, shrugged his shoulders, and went up to bed, while the two started off in Dalton's slow and somewhat decrepit car.

Streeter was delighted to be driving up to the wide view from the heights on such a perfect night. The heavens which he loved seemed to hold themselves open to his gaze like the pages of a well-known book, and he had plenty to say all the way.

Just as they were nearing that turning along which both Ord and Armitage had driven that night they saw the headlights of an approaching car, and slowed down. The car, driven very fast, whisked out of the side road, and sped on before them, running off the



road on the near side among trees just beyond the mill.

"Hallo, hallo, another visitor! Better not to be Armitage on a starlight night!" chuckled Dalton, who was one of those persons with no sense of humour who delight in small jokes.

He drew up the Trojan at the mill gate and, having helped his friend to alight, watched the big owner of the parked car crossing the road.

"Why, it's Armitage himself!" he said in some surprise. "So we certainly need not feel that we are disturbing him! Hallo, man! I heard from young Ord that you had had trouble with your car. However, you seem to have mended it."

The man approaching them had, when first he recognized them, stopped dead, almost as though he would have beaten a retreat. However, he thought better of it and advanced, crushing something soft which he was carrying up into a ball in his big hands. Already one of the lies he had told Garrie seemed to be coming home to roost.

"Hallo! That you Dalton? Oh, yes, the 'bus is all right. I told young Ord I had practically done it." He paused, looking from one to the other as if he found it difficult to collect his thoughts. "Want to come in?" he asked at length, resignedly.

Dalton had received in the first moments of this encounter a distinct impression of not being welcome. But he was not a sensitive person, and upon receiving the above tepid invitation he burst into speech, introducing his friend and apologizing for the hour by

explaining elaborately the reason for their coming. He volubly begged their host not to disturb himself on their account as they would themselves manipulate the telescope. As Dalton paid a certain portion of the rent of the mill Philip could not well refuse.

It seemed to him that the searchlight of publicity beat remorselessly upon him that night of all nights.

"Why," said Streeter, as they crossed the road, "I believe our host has been out poaching. What's that in your hand, Professor Armitage? Looks like a dead fox."

"It's a fox-fur," replied Armitage coldly. "You are not my first visitors to-night."

To Dalton, who knew him well, his whole manner was so stiff and aloof that, although, having brought Streeter, he had to go on with it, he felt it would be best not to prolong his stay. Streeter unfortunately, not having seen the mill before, was full of interest and would have wandered round and sat chatting in the living-room for an indefinite time had not Dalton urged him upstairs. Armitage did not offer to accompany them, nor did he produce any whisky when, after an inspection which Dalton cut somewhat short, they returned downstairs.

He owned to being tired, and refused Dalton's well-meant offer to return the fox-fur to its owner. "That's all right. There's no hurry; I can do it myself," he said dully; and when at last the door was locked behind them and he was left alone he almost fell into a chair, as though the limit of his endurance had been reached.



"I agree with young Ord," remarked Dalton, as they set off back to Gorchester, "Armitage isn't well. Pleasant fellow usually; didn't give you any idea to-night of what he's really like."

"Not very hospitable," smiled Streeter.

"Probably he's had relays of visitors all the evening, and is what my young people might describe as 'fed'," was the reply. "I wonder whose fur that was. Couldn't have been left here. He was carrying it across the road, wasn't he?"

Streeter laughed. "Married?" he asked.

"Who? Armitage? No. Very popular with the ladies, so my wife says."

"Been joy-riding is my guess, and fur got left in the car. You may have noticed that it was out of sight by the time we got downstairs. He had put it away carefully."

"Cautious chap; but he must have blessed us, barging in when he could hardly keep his eyes open. I'll apologize to him to-morrow. He's one of the best."

## CHAPTER VII

## CONSULTING DILYS

GARRIE ORD had no lecture to attend earlier than eleven o'clock on Saturday morning—as a result of which pleasing fact he promptly dropped asleep again after being called, and dreamed that he

was back in the mill, but in company Dalton, and I that as he groped across the room his contact with a dead body. The horror shouldn't him, to his great disgust. In the full light of man sunshine streaming in through his open window, happenings of the previous night did not look real, somehow. The freshly-spilt blood—it could probably have been quite easily accounted for had he mentioned it—but Armitage's demeanour and Armitage's lies? What about them? Well, anyway, it was not his business, and he had just decided to think no more about it when the door was opened and Miss Ord appeared bearing an appetizing breakfast-tray.

"Oh, good egg!" cried Garrie fervently. "That's the stuff to give 'em, oh, aunt of aunts and paragon of every auntly virtue!"

"Glad you appreciate your good-fortune as it deserves," observed the lady with a mock grimness which she often assumed and which her nephew well understood. "You won't find your wife doing this sort of thing for you when you're married."

"Think not?" said Garrie pensively as he raised himself to a sitting posture and grinned engagingly, his hair all rumpled so that his aunt had a most annoying desire to kiss him, which she sternly repressed. "I—wonder?"

"Save us, Garrie, that sounds as though you were speculating about someone in particular!"

"Really, Aunt Ag, is talk like this 'quaite naice'?" No good little undergrad. ever thinks about anyone



"Oh, we arrived at the nick of time! Between ourselves, we thought he must have just returned from driving some lady home. He was turning out from Welwych Heath Drive as we came by."

"Armitage was?" asked Garrie, almost startled. "Driving? . . . Then he'd mended his car?"

"Well, it was evidently going all right, so I suppose he had. It was old Streeter, to tell you the truth, who put me on to the idea of what he had been about. He had a fox-fur in his hand when he came up to us in the road—no doubt left in the car by accident."

"Kind of reddish colour?" asked Garrie absently.

"Yes. Do I gather that you know it? Does it give our friend away?"

"Oh," said Garrie, hastily gathering up his papers, "there are lots of 'em this term. Ugly things, aren't they? I must run, sir, or I shan't get my usual place, and if I don't I shan't be on the spot."

"Off with you. I am following at once."

Garrie wandered along the corridors, his candid features clouded with thought. So Irma had after all been in the car all the time that he and Armie were up in the Observatory. He must have started to drive her home the moment that he, Garrie, was out of sight? . . . Had she had an accident which they wanted to keep dark? . . . The story of the car being disabled was clearly all bunkum. . . . Then what in the name of all that was bewildering had Armie been up to? When he and Garrie first met

it was already as late as Irma should have been out. Yet he had left her alone in the car for a good hour, and had not seemed in the least anxious for Garrie to go. The whole matter looked extremely odd ; and he reflected with satisfaction that Dilys would be along that afternoon, and she knew Irma and all her ways—had probably seen her that morning.

He caught up his thoughts with a jerk. Was he becoming a busybody, like Joyce Clarke's great friend Phyllida Price, or that terror of the men's junior common room, Astley Barker ?

" If Armie hadn't told so many lies," he thought, " I shouldn't care a tinker's curse what he and Irma were doing—their show, not mine. As it is, the thing does look queer, I'm bound to own. If Armitage had taken Irma home, how could he possibly be in Welwych Drive ? "

His work that morning was, as later on Dalton acidly remarked, " not worthy of him." But he had brought back in his pocket from his last night's expedition such a valuable memorandum that the man for whom it had been done could not but be grateful, and own that it was perhaps rather much to expect his pupil to be in form that morning after such late and exacting work.

The change from summer to winter time had just been made, so the afternoon would be short, and Miss Ord had told the two players to come early.

Dilys arrived in a frock that really knocked Garrie sideways. It expressed in some indescribable way



that dryad aspect of her which appealed to him so strongly. "Why doesn't she always have frocks like that?" he asked himself inwardly, in masculine ignorance of the fact that the one in question had cost more than Dilys would have paid for clothes in a whole season.

Aunt Aggie also noted how pretty Dil was looking. Young Palmer, who was by way of being the Adonis of the undergraduates, seemed also aware of the fact. It was quite a little triumph for her.

In spite of not having been invited, a couple more players turned up later on, hoping for a game, so presently Garrie and Dilys, who had played two sets, stood out and wandered off together round the garden, which, though not large, was well planned, so that one could find a place therein well out of sight of those sitting under the verandah above the tennis-court, which Garrie kept in so perfect a state that it had quite a reputation among the students.

No sooner were the two seated together behind the tiny greenhouse than Garrie burst out :

"Beshrew me, wench, but I must use the privilege of a cousin to declare how much thy vesture pleaseth me !"

Dil laughed gaily. Where Garrie was concerned she had no self-consciousness. "Isn't it pretty? Fancy you noticing !"

"Fancy my noticing ! Explain your innuendo ! Why should not a man of discernment notice ?"

"Didn't credit you with discernment in that direction, Garrie, and that's the truth. But it is a

lovely frock, and I oughtn't to be wearing it to-day, but I just couldn't resist ! Irma gave it to me."

"Irma Varick? By Jove, did she? She knew what suited you, all right! Seen her this morning?"

"Oh, no, she has week-end leave—twice running, if you please!—and went off by the early train down to Devonshire."

"O-oh! Has she got people there?"

"Relations of sorts. Why, if you please, Mr. Paul Pry?"

Garrie coloured. "Well," said he slowly, "I wouldn't say this to anybody but you. But I really am tingling with curiosity over the young lady's movements of late. Rather odd things happened to me last night, and I want to talk them over. I may be exaggerating the importance of them. Care to hear?"

"Before you say anything, please understand that I like Irma—in fact I like her a good deal. She isn't fast, not really—not like the Joyce Clarke set. And she has a very difficult time. Civilization does seem a bit of a failure when a girl can't attend a university in peace just because she happens to be so pretty."

"It isn't merely pretty," said Garrie slowly. "That's the wrong word. There are other girls here who are just as beautiful, more so perhaps. I know one, at least. But she has the lure—the 'come hither' that no man can resist; no, and very few women either! Witness the old Kestrel, giving her leave two weeks running. Wonder what lie she told to get it?"



"I don't think Irma tells lies, Garrie——"

"Well, anyhow, she has taught her lover to tell 'em," observed Garrie darkly.

"Her lover?"

"Phil Armitage."

The colour flowed all over the girl's delicate face and throat. "Oh, Garrie! Tell me what you mean."

Garrie related the story of his starting out in the *Pêche* the previous evening, and seeing Armie and Irma drive up and go into the mill.

"Well, as far as that goes, I knew she was going out with Armie last night," said Dil defensively. "I heard them fix it up over the 'phone. They—they had a tiff yesterday after that lecture. You know he did speak rudely to her, didn't he? And she resented it. He had some trouble to make her consent to go for a drive with him, for he had hurt her feelings. She told me she wouldn't let him take her far, she wanted to be home early, because she was going off this morning."

"I own that, from what I couldn't help overhearing, she didn't seem keen to go into the mill—I'm sure she was expostulating—but she did go. Armie seemed to me to be in a bit of a paddy."

"Yes. And what did you do?"

"Well, I couldn't hang about there, could I? I did what I expect you would have done—went joy-riding for an hour, thinking that was long enough, because I knew she'd have to go back, so as to be in before the door was locked to get reported——"

"Yes, Garrie. Go on?"

"While I was joy-riding," observed Garrie irrelevantly, "I was wishing you were with me. It was such a dream of a night. . . . However, that isn't what you want to hear. When I got back Armie's two-seater was gone. But he might have parked it out of sight, and I didn't want to barge in if by any chance they were still there. So I went in to find out." He came to a sudden pause, with an acute memory of his feelings on entering the mill; realizing also that he could not allude to his panic, and deciding that he would suppress the pool of blood. Dil made an impatient sound, and he went on:

"Well, I could tell they had been there, by one thing and another, but they had gone, right enough. So I went down to the road again to park the *Pêche*; and suddenly Armie came plunging out of the bracken and stuff across the road, looking like nothing on earth. And he had the neck to tell me that he had only just come, and had smashed his 'bus. I suppose he invented that to account for the state he was in: looked as if he'd been rolling in the mud, and what not. I concluded that they had had a regular row, that she had insisted upon being taken home, and that he was contemplating the cutting of his own throat. However, he seemed bent on going back to the mill with me and helping with the glass. Moreover, he told me some more lies—quite unnecessary as far as I could see. When I first came into the mill the clock was going, and he stopped it when he came in—I was upstairs out of sight—and he afterwards declared to me that



it had never been going at all ! Of course the only result of these little efforts in fiction was to make me wonder, ' Why this thusness ? ' However, there was nothing to be done about it, so I got through the work I came to do and cleared out, leaving him all in, and saying he was going to sleep up there in the mill, as he sometimes does. I got home ; but just as I was getting into bed old Dalton and a smart friend from London Town turned up here at dead of night for the key. They wanted to verify some disputed point, and sailed off together in Dalton's little old Trojan looking just like the Wise Men of Gotham. And if you'll believe me, they met Armie driving along—returning to the mill in his car, which was going like a lamb. He was coming from the direction of Rose Crag, of all places in the world. He got out of his car and walked across the road to them, carrying in his hand that beastly bit of orange fur that Irma wears sometimes. I don't think Dalton knows it was hers, but they noticed it all right, for he asked me this morning if I knew whose it was ! Don't you think it's all a bit fishy ? ”

“ Why, Garrie, it sounds perfectly wild to me,” replied Dilys slowly. She had collected herself after the first shock of hearing of this nocturnal expedition, and was able to show a composed face. “ Armie was taking his lecture this morning,” she added. “ I thought him depressed, but he seemed otherwise quite himself, except for——”

“ Yes—well—except for——”

“ His face,” was the hesitating reply. “ He says

he had frightful neuralgia in the night, and his jaw was swelled. He had actually been already to the dentist and had two extractions, poor chap ! That interfered with his speaking, of course ; otherwise I've never heard him lecture better."

" Oh, well," replied Garrie, mentally digesting this piece of information. " If he was in tortures with toothache last night, no wonder he seemed a bit off colour. Perhaps he had been rolling in the dirt in his agony, like old St. what's-his-name. I say, you do realize that all this doesn't go beyond you and me, don't you ? "

" Of course, old thing ; and if he was not only feeling ill but had been turned down by Irma as well, one can forgive a lie or two to save his face. Don't you agree ? "

" Oh, yes, every time," assented her cousin ; but he was reflecting inwardly, " Either he dashed himself through his windscreen—the men of Gotham wouldn't have noticed that—or else—or else he'd been fighting. I wonder ? "

## CHAPTER VIII

## PUZZLED

AT supper-time at the " Kittery " that Saturday night those of the students who had been out in the afternoon with the geological party reported



that poor old Armie had been expected, but had not put in an appearance. It was rumoured that he had sent a note to Parry (the physiological lecturer) to the effect that he had been in the dentist's hands and was afraid of the keen wind.

One or two girls openly admitted that they should not have gone at all had they known he would be absent. Armie was such a scream ; he always got fun even out of the dreariest stratification in the west of England.

Dil listened calmly to these comments. She was used to it.

"Hasn't been up to his usual form lately."

"Dull as ditch-water last week." . . .

"Oh, that's Irma's fault, bad luck to her !" . . .

"Yes, she determined to subdue him, and he took some vamping." . . .

"Poor chap !" . . .

"Resisted at first, but now——"

"Now *la belle dame sans merci* has him in thrall good and proper !"

"Suppose *she* wasn't there this afternoon ?"

"No, silly, she's got week-end leave."

"Expect that accounts for his not coming. He isn't one to take any notice of the toothache."

"Hope he gets new teeth before she sees him next !"

"Expect he'll take good care of that !"

"Well, I've always thought him far and away the most attractive man in Gorchester. Good-lookers like Palmer are not in the same street with a man of his

fascination, so I shouldn't altogether wonder if Irma's in earnest at last."

"Heaven send it! Some of us may have a look-in somewhere when she's finished her hunting."

"Oh, you *are* a vulgar lot!" burst out Dilys, goaded into speech at last.

"Because we *say* what you only *think*," was the instant riposte.

"Naturally you can only judge the contents of my mind by the contents of your own."

"Can you deny it?"

"Deny what?"

"That it'll be a good thing for everybody when Irma's made her kill."

"I'm quite sure it will be a good thing for *her*, if that's what you mean——"

"All very well for Pendered to try on the prunes-prism line. Everyone knows that she has at least one adorer."

Dilys was so surprised that she unwisely cried, "What *are* you talking about?"

"So handy to have a cousin——"

"Conveniently removed, but not out of reach—not by any means!"

"With a perfectly good aunt for a chaperon——"

Much relieved, Dilys uttered a little sound of scorn. "That all? Oh, you really are—— I'll tell you exactly what you are like. Ever read the immortal Jane? If you want to see your own portraits, read the account of Isabella Thorpe and her manœuvres at the pump-room!"



Laura Bradman spoke, a thing she seldom did when the talk was general. "If this is a sample of our table talk," remarked she calmly, "I shall have to move a resolution at the debating society, 'That silence be imposed upon all students at mealtimes.'"

"I should vote on your side," said Joyce Clarke pertly. "Women are not fit to talk among themselves. Perhaps I might move an amendment to the effect that all boarding-houses should be for both sexes—or, at least, that all feeding-rooms should be so."

"Not a bad notion; at least it would keep *you* quiet," remarked Dilys as she rose from table.

Joyce quoted loudly :

And the imperial votaress passed on  
In maiden meditation, fancy free.

Upstairs, in the sitting-room which she shared with Laura, Dilys burst out laughing.

"Aren't they childish? One can't be angry with such a set of noodles! It's hard to believe that most of them have the rudiments of a brain tucked away somewhere! . . . What are you going to do? I'm thinking of walking round to Houston Square to return that suit-case of Irma's that Etheldreda Jenkins brought the frocks in."

"Those lovely frocks! You are a lucky beast," sighed Laura, opening Dil's little hanging-cupboard to gaze upon them suspended within.

"Come with me?" asked Dil, energetically dusting the empty suit-case.

go that night without leave, but she just laughed in her way—you know, miss. So we carried down her things and put 'em close to the front door and off we went ; and when we come back of course she and her luggage was gone, as I expected to find."

"I see," replied Dilys. "I shall say nothing about this, Mrs. Jenkins—it's not my business ; but I don't think you ought to do it again. Miss Hawke would be considerably upset if she knew."

"Yes, I'm sure she would, and I said the same to Etheldreda. But then, Miss Varick is such a nice girl ; I'm sure she's never given trouble from the first day she came until to-night. If it had been one of those fly-aways same as we get sometimes—of course I name no names—I should have felt obliged to tell her I must ring up Miss Hawke for leave. But with her it was different. Never been in late she hasn't, not once, miss. So I think I'll hold my tongue ; but, come Monday, I must warn her not to do it again."

"Yes, do. I don't want her to get into hot water," replied Dilys. "Good evening, and thank you. She's having lovely weather, isn't she ?"

Dilys had never thought of herself as being of an inquisitive nature, yet her curiosity was very thoroughly aroused by the above interview. What on earth had Irma and Phil Armitage been about the previous evening ? It was easy to guess that he had called for her, deposited the luggage at the station and taken her for a drive ; but when Garrie saw them together at the gate of the mill it was already too late for her



to have caught the express. Had they planned for an all-night drive, and subsequently quarrelled, so as to alter their arrangements?

Dilys knew Armitage and knew Irma. She did not believe that he would suggest, nor that she would have agreed to, any arrangement of the kind. Modern they might be, but of that particular type of modernity she could not suspect them.

There was, however, as far as she could see, nothing that she could or ought to do about it. She must wait at least until Monday and Irma's return, and even then she did not expect to obtain any kind of explanation. "Though I think I'll warn her that she had better be more careful," mused Dil. "Mrs. Jenkins mentioned to me quite casually about her having left Gorchester on Friday night instead of Saturday morning, so she may tell other people as well, and Irma may get called over the coals for it, which would be a pity after she has kept such a clean conduct-sheet, in spite of her beauty and popularity. But of all queer things, for it to be a man like Armitage who was aiding and abetting! She must have driven him stark mad. They say it is so with a man like that. If he does fall in love it is neck or nothing." She sighed upon the reflection. "I expect I don't a bit know what he is really like, because there is nothing in me to stir him up," she mused. "I am too calm and reasonable, so he thinks. Ah, if he only knew!"

On Sunday afternoon kind Miss Ord, who had

heard of the dentist episode, announced her intention of ringing up Phil Armitage and asking him to come round and have tea quietly.

"Two extractions at once is a nasty shock," said she, "and a man can never nurse himself. On the whole, I think it would be a good thing, Garrie, if you bicycled round with a note from me. I will suggest that he might like to bring a bag and spend the night; I could doctor him a bit and see that he went to bed early."

"All right," replied Garrie, who was distinctly anxious to see Armitage again. His curiosity was of a more raging description than even that of Dilys. He could not conceive of any reason why Armitage, who had sent him off with the avowed intention of going to bed at once, should have driven away immediately afterwards in the direction of Rose Craggs. No reason, except one too horrible to contemplate—namely, that he had murdered Irma and went to throw her body over the cliffs. Of course one knew old Phil. One of the best. . . . All nonsense. . . . But that blood on the mill floor. . . .

At this point Garrie snatched his thoughts violently away. To-morrow, he told himself, Irma would be back and could be questioned. But, if he had been a sensation-monger, how the whole thing fitted in! The fact that Armitage and Irma had gone into the mill together. An hour later Irma had disappeared, but he had come upon Armitage in a state of evident mental and physical disorder. There was no doubt that he had tried to conceal all evidence of having been



in the mill earlier that night ; and finally, as soon as he thought himself alone at last he had driven off—whither ? He had been seen returning from a direction which made it most unlikely that he was coming from Gorchester ; and in his hand he had carried Irma's fur necklet. It was, past contradiction, a curious affair.

He duly delivered the note at Armitage's rooms, and was told that he was resting, so did not wait for an answer. He was cycling slowly along the upper roads of Gorchester, intending to ride round the downs a bit before returning to Majendie Terrace, when he encountered Dilys, on her way to have tea with Mr. and Mrs. Benson, at St. Bede's Vicarage.

Instantly dismounting, he greeted her warmly, and said he would walk along with her as far as the Vicarage door.

" I'm glad to meet you, Garrie," said Dilys frankly, " because you are the only person who is a bit worried about Irma—the only person I can talk to——"

" Well," replied Garrie honestly, " I should be delighted to see you, Dil, even if Irma had never been born. But I'll own that I'm more than a bit puzzled over last night, and I itch to have things explained. If I dared I would go round to Houston Square and ask old Mother Jenkins how she seemed yesterday morning before she started off."

" Oh, Garrie, that's the point—the whole point ! This is what I want to tell you ! *She did not go off yesterday morning.* She went off on Friday night ! "

"Is that so?" said Garrie slowly. "Do you know what sort of time?"

"Nobody knows even that exactly. Mrs. Jenkins and Etheldreda went to the theatre, leaving her to ring up for a cab. But I'm certain that she went in Armie's car. I heard her fix it up."

"Took her luggage?"

"Yes. The question is, what shall I do about it when she comes back to-morrow? Hadn't I better give her a bit of a telling-off? She'll be getting herself in the soup, not to mention that the companion she chooses to play about with is a bachelor don of our revered University."

"When she comes back to-morrow," repeated Garrie thoughtfully. "What time has she to be back?"

"She has leave for her morning lecture, but Parry wouldn't let her off the afternoon. I shall see her there, of course. Oh, she'll be as demure as a kitten after lapping a saucer of cream! Bad girl; I could shake her! Why is it that some folks can steal a horse while others mayn't even look over the hedge?"

"There you have me, I'm afraid; but I own that I shall feel a sort of relief when I do set eyes upon our reigning belle once more. If it had been any other man than P. A. I admit I should really be feeling anxious on her account. However, it'll all be cleared up to-morrow. The renowned sleuth from Scotland Yard won't be requisitioned."

They parted company at the Vicarage gate, two



eager children who had been watching at the window for Dil to arrive, flying out and capturing her without waiting for Garrie's adieux.

He mounted his bicycle and skimmed away, debating within himself, "Could *she* have knocked his teeth out, I wonder? It might account for the blood on the floor."

But in his heart he knew very clearly that Armitage never would or could have behaved in such a manner as to render such treatment justifiable, even if possible, which seemed very doubtful.

## CHAPTER IX

## WHERE IS IRMA?

PHILIP ARMITAGE, somewhat to Aunt Aggie's surprise, did actually turn up to tea that Sunday afternoon at Majendie Terrace in response to her note. He looked so ill that she was startled, thinking he must be in for a serious breakdown.

Miss Ord was alone—a fact which, it must be owned, he had carefully ascertained before entering—and he sat down with a sigh of relief beside the fire, which was pleasant, even in view of the St. Luke's summer they were enjoying, and impatiently disclaimed any symptoms except those consequent upon a couple of extractions and a sleepless night.

His thoughtful hostess substituted a bowl of bread and milk for the usual scones, and he attacked it so

eagerly that she remarked, "I don't believe you have eaten anything to-day—now have you?"

He owned it, with a smile and a shrug. "Mrs. Dicks has roast beef on Sundays, and I couldn't manage it," he explained. "This is the stuff I want."

"Now why not stay the night, as I suggested, and let me nurse you a bit," she coaxed him, but he was obdurate on this point. His work was in arrears, owing to his attack of pain, and he could not leave it. He lay back in his chair, with an air of complete exhaustion, tried to smoke, and desisted ruefully. He was evidently disinclined to talk, and over her knitting-needles she observed with disquietude the blue hollows under his eyes.

Time slipped by in the dusk, and she had just begun to hope that he would fall asleep when a couple of very garrulous and argumentative students arrived to discuss with Garrie the details of a debate.

Garrie not being there, they decided to wait for him; whereupon Armitage stirred restlessly and, with a pleading glance at his hostess, rose to depart.

She followed him, excusing herself to the two ardent debaters, and led him into the dining-room, where she took a wine-glass from the table ready laid for supper.

"A glass of port to keep out the cold," said she, pouring it from a decanter on the sideboard; "and one other thing I insist upon—you must take this pot of Bovril home with you. Mrs. Dicks most likely has not any, and on Sunday evening she



cannot get any; this will prevent your being supperless."

He accepted all her kindness with gratitude and slipped off; and only after his departure did she realize how unlike himself he had been all the time.

"Something has happened to Armitage," thought she. "I expect Garrie knows, or guesses. He is either ill a good deal more so than he admits, or he's in trouble of some kind."

His usual manner of simple friendliness lit by touches of humour had always seemed to her like an old, loose coat, easy to slip on and disguising the lines of his personality. When she fancied what he might be like without it, she recalled the curious, widely-opened, light grey eyes and could easily picture them lit by a fanatic glare. She was sure there was a very positive Philip within the more or less negative one which he usually presented.

"Dilys would be the wife for him: something to lean upon, something to restrain him, but to charm him even in the act of doing so. As for the minx Irma, she's the very worst thing that could have happened to him," thought she. "Her going away this week-end looks as though she were not very serious even now. I expect she keeps him on the rack."

In view of the long list of Irma's victims she did not forget to feel grateful that Garrie was one of the exceptions, almost the only young man in the University who was perfectly free of what Joyce Clarke called "Varickitis."

On Monday she was sorry to hear from Garrie when he came in to lunch that Armitage was by no means recovered. He had given his lecture, looking like nothing on earth, and gone home immediately after ; but he had sent his love by Garrie to Miss Ord and a message that her Bovril had been a godsend.

On Sunday night the weather had changed, and an equinoctial gale raged, with stinging rain. The whole of Monday was wet and cold, and on Tuesday, although the downpour ceased, one felt the approach of winter in the grey skies and moaning wind.

On that morning Miss Ord put on a waterproof and went to do her morning shopping and to enjoy various short but pleasant chats with those acquaintances whom she was sure to meet in the execution of her duty. She had just purchased a couple of dabs for her supper—Garrie usually dined in college—when, on leaving the fishmonger's, she came face to face with Miss Hawke, *alias* the "Kestrel," who was walking along hurriedly, her face expressing a good deal of agitation.

She stopped at once upon seeing Miss Ord. "Oh, have you a minute to spare?" she asked nervously. "I am a good deal upset and should like to talk to you—to consult you. You know Irma Varick, don't you? Know her personally?"

"Certainly. I hope she isn't ill?"

"My dear lady, I don't know what to think. I am on my way now to interview Mrs. Gray" (the lady



head of the women's university), "and I am half distracted. If you can give me the time, let us walk up here for a moment—we could sit down by the Cabot Memorial—and I'll tell you all about it. I suppose you have heard nothing of her?"

"Of Irma? Since when? I asked her one day last week—Thursday I think it was—to come to tennis on Saturday and she rang up to say she was going away for the week-end——"

"Yes. And that's the last you know?"

"As you may suppose. Isn't she back?"

"No, she is not, and the whole thing is a complete mystery. Let me tell you exactly how it was. The week-end before this Irma had asked for leave to go to her aunt in Devonshire. She is a Miss Bond, a charming woman. I am always glad for Irma to go there, and willingly gave leave for the purpose. Then, about the middle of last week, she came to me again, saying that she was about to beg for another leave, and she hoped very much I would not forbid it, because the circumstances were exceptional. She went on to explain that her Aunt Clarissa—Miss Bond's sister, who is in a missionary sisterhood in India—is home just now on furlough, which they only get once in three years. She is to spend most of it with a married brother in Scotland, but was coming to Ivybridge for a few days first, and this would be, in all probability, Irma's only chance to see her at all. You know that Irma has not many relatives, and is much alone since Professor and Mrs. Varick went off to Evian-les-Bains. I did not like to refuse her because she is such a good

girl—never overstays her leave, or is at all unreasonable, though she is older than some of them, and is, moreover, financially independent. I thought it would do her good to see Sister Clarissa, and I told her she might go. She was to come back on Monday by a train that reaches Gorchester just before two, and I asked her either to ring me up, or ask Mrs. Jenkins to do so, as soon as she was safely home."

"And she did not?"

"As it happened, I was out all that afternoon, tremendously busy with a meeting of the finance committee, and I did not get home until between six and seven. My maid said that Mrs. Jenkins had rung up twice while I was out and seemed in a nervous state, saying that Miss Varick had not come in, either on the train by which she was expected nor on the next. I rang up at once to make inquiries, and learned to my extreme displeasure that Irma had gone away on the Friday night and not on Saturday morning as arranged. Of course Mrs. Jenkins ought to have told me—it was most irregular; but, as she said, and as I know, Irma is always so trustworthy that she had suspected nothing. I thought the next thing to do was to telegraph Miss Bond at Ivybridge—they had the address—and at about nine o'clock last night I got this reply." She took a telegram from her bag and showed it to Miss Ord:

Irma's visit cancelled last moment stop am awaiting promised letter stop will send news when I hear.—

ISABEL BOND.



Miss Ord looked grave.

"This, I gather," said she thoughtfully, "means that Irma had really no intention of going to Ivybridge, but was using her aunt's name in order to cover her real destination. . . . But surely in that case she would have been all the more scrupulous to come home in time, otherwise her character for trustworthiness would be gone. . . . I can't help fearing that something has happened—that she has played with fire and been more or less burnt."

"You think that? It is my own fear," said the Kestrel brokenly. "I must ask Mrs. Gray what ought to be done. Do you think we should notify the police?"

"If there is the least suspicion of her having come to any harm I think you should. Have you telegraphed to her aunt Mrs. Bennett in London?"

"Not yet. Perhaps I ought—in fact, I must—but she would not be likely to go there and not to let us know, would she? She must be aware of my anxiety. She is not a callous girl, nor hard-hearted; and as she has *not* let us know I feel there must be some reason why."

"One does indeed fear it. Dear Miss Hawke, I think you should lose no time. Irma disappeared on Friday night, and this is Tuesday. What inquiries have you made? The cabman who drove her to the station? What time did she go off? What luggage did she take? Who saw her last?"

Miss Hawke turned pale. Her hope had been that talk with Miss Ord might lessen her qualms, that the

lady would assure her that the young monkey would certainly turn up in due course, sweetly apologetic at having caused trouble. It was terrifying to find that her friend took an even more serious view than she herself had done. She rose in great agitation from the seat on which they had been talking and begged Miss Ord to go with her to interview Mrs. Gray.

"I'll certainly go with you as far as her door," replied Miss Ord, and, as they hastened on, the poor Kestrel revealed the further disquieting fact that Mrs. Jenkins had not even seen Irma depart, and did not know for certain at what hour or in what company this had taken place.

"As you point out, the telegram to her aunt shows that she was not intending to go there. It points to a duplicity I did not expect," sighed the Kestrel.

"Well, you know, I don't want to make you more fidgety than you are, my poor dear, but there is another possibility: who can say that a telegram is authentic? It might come from anybody, might it not?"

Miss Hawke was aghast. "What a suggestion! She may have—— Oh, any number of things may have happened to her——"

"The sending of the telegram was obviously to gain time," said Miss Ord thoughtfully. "Had she not arrived at Miss Bond's and sent no message her aunt would at once have communicated with you, would she not? By Saturday you would have known that she was missing, whereas now one



simply dare not conjecture where she has been and what she has been doing all this time—such a lovely girl ! ”

“ And they say that girls are safe in these days—that they need no looking after ! ” cried the poor Kestrel bitterly. “ Well, if I have my way, this will be the very end of allowing any girl to live out of a hostel, except at her own home ! Irma was supposed to dine with us four times a week, and she always kept to that unless she had notified me beforehand. You see, she was not quite on the footing of an ordinary student. She had had a year at Westfield and a year in Rome. . . . I suppose you have no idea, no glimmering of a suspicion as to what she can have been about ? You would tell me if you had, would you not ? ”

“ I have none, and Garrie and she are not particularly friendly,” replied Miss Ord. “ He is a young man who does not fancy playing the rôle of the moth to any candle. But I tell you who might know something, and that is my cousin’s daughter, Dilys Pendered. She is, I fancy, almost the only girl in College with whom Irma has been at all intimate.”

This piece of information evidently caused surprise.

“ Miss Pendered ! ” said Miss Hawke wonderingly. “ The very last girl I should have thought——”

“ Why do you say that ? ”

“ Because Dilys is so unsophisticated, so badly off, so centred on her work. She is a girl whom I really

love, and I cannot say as much—though I own this with regret—of many of the girls I have now ! Irma could not have a better friend, but I am surprised that she should have chosen her.”

Aunt Aggie smiled. “She would certainly have had to do the choosing ; Dilys would never put herself forward.”

“No, indeed ! Although she is so clever, she is modest also—almost to a fault. But I am more than grateful to you for the hint. I will certainly question her as soon as I am through this dreadful interview.”

“I’m afraid I mustn’t wait,” said Miss Ord, parting from her on the doorstep ; “but in Mrs. Gray’s place I should set inquiries on foot at once. It is quite possible that Dilys may be able to give you a lead.”

## CHAPTER X

## THINGS LOOK BAD

DILYS came out from the lecture-room on Tuesday morning in such an exalted frame of mind that she hardly knew where she was.

Professor Parry had detained her, and spoken to her concerning an essay which she had sent up for a prize at the end of last term. He told her that the prize was hers, and, not merely so, but that no other essay



of those submitted was anywhere near her standard. "Your work shows more than application, it displays originality of thought."

Those had been the blissful words. He had gone on to suggest that she ought to become a physician, and not be content, according to her former modest ambition, with the qualifications of a dispenser. She had told him that such a course for her was out of the question. There were no funds at her disposal for so long a training. To that he had replied that, as she knew, there were various sources from which the expenses of an exceptionally promising pupil might be defrayed.

"A promising pupil," he observed dryly, "is a comparative rarity in these days. Every year that I have been in my present post there has been a decline in the industry and application of my students, though I'm loath to say this. I think it very likely that if your work this term is up to its usual standard you might sit for the Lennox Prize, and that means a year's free tuition."

The heart of Dilys beat tumultuously. Ah, if it were but possible! She plucked up courage, however, to explain her circumstances fully to the Professor.

"There are two boys, and they must have their chance. There simply isn't a penny more to be spent on me after the end of next summer. Not a penny! A year's free tuition would only half meet the case."

"Then we must consider other plans," said he,

with a very encouraging smile. "As for you, it is your part to do your very utmost this term, so that the examiners may feel they have no option but to foster such talent. Off with you now! By the way, your prize is worth ten pounds, you know, and even that helps—eh?"

As she neared the box wherein sat Groggs, sorting letters and parcels, Dilys' heart was like a singing bird. "I'll ring up Irma and tell her. She's one of the few that would be really interested," she thought.

"Miss Pendered. Note for you miss," said Groggs as she passed. "Mrs. Gray sent it in half an hour ago."

"Mrs. Gray?" said Dilys, in surprise, taking the note from his hands. So filled was she with the news of her success, so elated, that she thought this might be a line of congratulation from the august lady.

It was merely a pencil message and bore evidence of haste :

Please come up and see me the moment you leave the University building. I can give you lunch, but I must see you first.

Dilys pondered this. What could it mean? Had she been getting into hot water—she whose conduct-sheet was so blameless?

She hurried up the road as far as the University Club to let the waiters know she should not be lunching



there. "Please tell Miss Bradman, when she comes, not to expect me," she said ; and forthwith caught a tram up to higher ground.

Upon reaching her destination she was at once taken in to Mrs. Gray's own delightful sitting-room. Mrs. Gray was an enthusiast on early Italian art, and the room was hung with Medici reproductions.

As the girl entered the anxious lady seated awaiting her thought she much resembled Fra Lippo's portrait of his Lucretia.

"Is that Miss Pendered? Yes? Thank you for being so punctual. Sit down—you'll find that chair comfortable. I am sorry to send for you so abruptly, and won't keep you longer than necessary, but I am told that you are on terms of friendship with—er—Irma Varick"—Dil's heart gave a frightened leap—"and I want—I wish you please to tell me when you last saw her?"

"Why," burst from Dilys, her agitation banishing shyness, "do you mean that she—she hasn't come back?"

Mrs. Gray regarded fixedly the warm flush, the signs of surprise and dismay. "You knew she was going away? Exactly when, please, did you see her last?"

This was a question that could be answered without hesitation or fear of implicating anyone else. "I lunched with her at her di—I should say in Houston Square—on Friday last," said she clearly. "She then told me that she had week-end leave."

"Yes. Did she tell you where she meant to spend it?"

"That question did not come up. She said she had got off her Monday morning lecture but hoped to be back for the afternoon one. You know, we never do very much on Monday mornings up in the labs."

"Had you no idea where she was going, then?"

"Oh, yes I—I took it for granted that she was going to stay in Devonshire with her aunt, Miss Bond."

"But did she not actually say so to you?"

"I don't think so. No, I am quite sure she did not."

"Have you any kind of idea—you will speak fully to me, I hope—any idea, even a vague one, as to where she might go, if not to Ivybridge?"

"No, I really haven't. She has an aunt in London, but she hardly ever goes there in term-time."

"I have ascertained that she did not go there. They have no knowledge of her," was the heavy reply. Then, after a moment's pause, Mrs. Gray went on, "Was there anyone else beside yourself lunching with Irma on Friday?"

"Oh, no, we were quite alone. In fact, Irma locked the door and hung up a notice—'Not at Home'."

Mrs. Gray's austere lips were just touched by an austere smile.

"May I ask you to keep this affair quite between ourselves for the present? Thank you. You look like a girl one would trust. Now tell me—were you



aware that it was for the second time running that Irma had week-end leave? ”

“ Yes, I knew that. We teased her about it. Two weeks running, just at the beginning of term — ”

“ And where did you suppose she went the former time? ”

“ Why, to Ivybridge, to Miss Bond — ”

“ Just so. But we find out that that is not so. I have just been in communication with Miss Bond, and I find there had never been any suggestion of her going there last week. This week they did expect her, but she telegraphed at the last moment to say she was not coming, and has sent no further explanation. ”

Dilys was looking very white. “ Irma ! I never would have suspected her of lying. No, Mrs. Gray, she isn't like that — ”

“ I am glad to hear you say so ; but I fear facts are against you, ” was the grave reply. “ However, I want more information, if you please. How did Irma seem during that lunch you had with her? Was she in her usual spirits? ”

“ Yes, I think so—quite. You know she is always a bit—I hardly know what to call it—variable is perhaps the best word. I mean she jumps from one thing to another and from grave to gay. She was vexed because the male students will *not* leave her alone, and she said, but I am sure only in fun, that she would be forced to take the veil or—or to commit suicide. . . . She said she really felt that she could

• bear it no longer ; she could do no sustained work, and that she had come here for the purpose of working. I really think she was in earnest about that, though not about being a nun nor about killing herself. She loves life."

" But it is your true opinion that she was definitely bothered by the folly of the students ? "

" Yes, I know she was. She was joking, but under the joking she was in earnest. I feel sure of that."

" Thank you. Now, at what time did you suppose her to be leaving for her week-end ? "

" By the nine o'clock train on Saturday morning."

" Quite so. She did not tell you that she meant to go off on the Friday night ? Please be quite frank."

• " No, she said nothing of the kind ; but I have since discovered that she did leave on Friday, because I went round on Saturday afternoon to return something she had lent me, and Mrs. Jenkins, her landlady, told me that she had gone."

• " Yes." After a short reflection Mrs. Gray continued. " Now, forgive me, but I must ask you this. Have you any kind of suspicion of who might be likely to be her companion ? " The colour flamed to the pale cheeks of Dilys. " Ah, I think you have ! Miss Pendered, it is your solemn duty to tell me anything you may suspect. With what student should you think it most likely——"

The form of this question so relieved Dilys that she answered impressively, even eagerly : " Mrs. Gray, I



can assure you that, judging from what I know of her, for Irma to go off with any student seems to be impossible. Besides, are any of the male students absent? I expect you have inquired, or will inquire, about that; but let me assure you that never, in all the time that I've known Irma, has she ever shown the smallest partiality for any of these young men who follow her about. I can give you a list of a dozen with whom she has gone motoring, or rambling about, or to dine and do a theatre in Bath; but never has she said or done anything at all to make me suppose she cared a bit about any of them."

"So," said Mrs. Gray, after another of those short, reflective pauses which made Dilys nervous, "so that you have no kind of a suspicion, eh?"

Dilys knew that she hesitated a moment, but she said, "I have none."

It was true. Because, as she was repeating over and over to herself, if it was Philip, Irma was all right. She must be. Nothing else was possible. She would go bail for Philip.

To tell Mrs. Gray that she had every reason to believe that Irma had gone driving with him on the fatal night might be to put him into a most uncomfortable position; for, from what Garrie had told her, something had passed, something had gone wrong between those two on that particular evening. If Philip was to be dragged into it, she was determined that it should not be by her. It was not her business; and, moreover, Mrs. Gray would very soon learn it, once she started her inquiry, for the whole Kittery was

expecting each day to hear of the engagement, and would cry as with one voice, "Professor Armitage," if questioned.

"Dilys," said her inquisitor at length, in a tone that showed distress, "is this really all that you can tell me?"

"Mrs. Gray," said the girl, with tears in her eyes, "I have answered every question you have put to me quite truly. Indeed I have. I am practically certain that there is not a single student for whom Irma cares two straws."

"Can you tell me with equal certainty that you have no idea where she was likely to go?"

"I can indeed. She never told me anything about it—never gave me so much as a hint! I could almost go further and say that I am fairly sure that at lunch-time she had not the least intention of bolting. Any such plan must have been made later. She attended her lecture that afternoon, and seemed in no hurry to get away. We did not have tea together, because I was going to 'Freddie's' with Laura—Laura Bradman. It was her birthday and she gave a tea-party there."

Mrs. Gray sighed deeply. Everything that Dilys said was making her feel it more and more likely that Irma had come to some harm. To be sure, there was the telegram sent to her aunt; but, as Miss Ord had reminded Miss Hawke, a telegram is not conclusive. Anybody can send it; and there now arose before her alarmed mind the further consciousness that, had the message really come from Irma as it purported to do,



there would certainly have been before now a message from her to Miss Hawke. She must have known that from Monday afternoon onwards anxiety would be caused by her non-appearance.

She looked so thoroughly distressed that Dilys felt more in sympathy with her than ever before. She ventured to say, "Please, Mrs. Gray, if any news should come, if you hear of Irma, you will let me know, won't you? I believe I came nearer to being her friend than any other student, though, of course, I see now that I was not in her confidence: that is to say, unless something unforeseen, something dreadful has happened to her——"

Mrs. Gray rose abruptly from her seat.

"No, my dear girl, we will not allow ourselves to dwell on that. I still suppose it to be an escapade. But I am taking steps, nevertheless—I assure you that I am taking steps. I hoped that you could have told me more, in view of the very serious circumstances; but if you cannot, you cannot. Only, I charge you solemnly if any information comes to hand it is your duty to let me know of it at once."

## CHAPTER XI

## TACKLING PHILIP

DILYS succeeded in escaping Mrs. Gray's somewhat half-hearted suggestion that she should stay to lunch, and hastened back at top speed to the

Kittery. As most of her own set were lunching that day at the University Club (the "Uck," as undergraduate custom named it) in honour of somebody's birthday, she knew that she should be able to eat in comparative quiet in the hostel while thinking over what she had heard and deciding upon what she ought to do.

The refectory was half empty, as she had hoped, and the Kestrel did not appear. The delight of her prize-winning, the triumph with which she had hoped to be able to write home, the gratification of issuing invitations for a tea-party at "Freddie's" to celebrate the occasion, were all forgotten in the horrifying puzzle that faced her.

It seemed to her certain that the answer to that puzzle was Professor Armitage. Garrie had definitely seen Irma in his company on Friday night—was probably the last person, except Armitage, who had seen her at all. Surely, if the police were to be called in that was the very first thing they ought to know?

Her own strong belief in the integrity and honour of the Professor made her feel certain that, the moment it came to his ears that Irma was missing, he would himself supply all the data in his possession.

She wished that somehow, casually, without seeming to "butt in," she could convey to him the information that Irma had not returned. Thinking over the situation as she knew it, she thought it most probable that Irma, having quarrelled definitely and irremediably with her lover, thought it best not to return



to Gorchester, at least for a time. Probably the dispute had kept her too late to catch her train to Exeter, and she had gone elsewhere after telegraphing her aunt. But in that case why had she left the poor Kestrel and Mrs. Jenkins without news of her?

Dilys felt that if she could not discuss the matter with someone she would grow desperate. The only person, except herself, who knew anything about it was Garrie.

Acting on a sudden impulse she ran to the telephone and miraculously caught him at home, whither he had gone for a few minutes only, to fetch some books.

"I say, Garrie, come to tea with me at 'Freddie's' this afternoon at four—that is to say, as soon as Dalton lets us off. I have some most unexpected news for you about myself, and also I have something else that I really must consult you about. Do please come."

Garrie had another engagement, but he hastened to assure her that nothing should prevent his coming to tea with her. "I want to talk to you, too," said he, "and I don't mind betting that it's about the same subject. Aunt Ag told me that Irma is missing—no harm in saying so—it can't be kept dark, probably every female in this University knows it already. All right! I'll look out for you at the door as soon as Dalton lets us go. Don't let the old bird keep you jawing on your way out—he's partial to you, I've noticed."

"Oh, have you? Not half as partial as he is to

you ! You're his white-headed lad, and no mistake !  
"However, no more now. See you later."

Dilys had just time to dash off a letter to her people, conveying the glad tidings of the Wavertree Prize. She put on her pretty frock to go out to tea, and set off for her lecture with a quarter of an hour to spare, as she wanted to take down some notes which Dalton had left pinned on the blackboard after the last lecture.

It was too early for the students to assemble, and, as she had hoped, she found herself alone in the lecture-room, but, long before she had finished transcribing, the door was flung open abruptly and someone came in.

The blackboard was between herself and the newcomer, and she did not pause to find out who it was ; but he came round to where she stood, and with a little jump of the heart she recognized Philip Armitage.

That anyone could so have altered during a week-end seemed almost impossible. His eyes had purple shadows, his face had fallen in. He was pale and his manner was lifeless.

He acknowledged her presence with a kind little nod, and remarked, " Come for these notes ? So have I. Wonderful chap, Dalton."

He spoke in a muffled way—evidently his jaw was stiff—and he avoided smiling.

In a moment Dilys had taken her resolve. She would spring what she had to say upon him unawares, and note his reaction.



"I suppose," she said without preface, "that you have heard the news that Irma Varick is missing?"

From his sudden stillness, from his very quietude, his general air of bracing himself to receive attack, she knew quite well *that he was not surprised to hear it.*

There was a scarcely perceptible pause between her question and his reply. "I noticed she did not come to the lecture this morning," he then said, quietly enough. "What do you think she can be doing? I hope it isn't illness?"

Dilys raised her lovely, thick-lashed eyes to his face searchingly. It was probably the first time that he had met that limpid gaze fully; but she must find out his meaning if she could. His own gaze flickered over her a moment, as if in surprise that she should be somehow unlike his previous notion of her—that she should be, in fact, someone to be reckoned with. He looked somewhat taken aback.

"She is not here. I mean, she has not returned to Gorchester," said Dilys earnestly. "She had week-end leave and she has neither returned nor sent an excuse for absence."

"Indeed! Week-end leave, had she——"

Dilys broke in sharply. "You did not know it?"

He met her look this time, a little haughtily and raising his brows. "How should I know it?" he asked coldly; adding after a moment's awkward silence, "I disapprove of these week-ends, especially so early in term. Miss Varick might do good work if she would stick to it."

Words and manner were so unlike what she had looked for that she felt quite at a loss ; but she managed to say, and to say with emphasis, " She went away on Friday night."

" I wonder she obtained leave to do that," he answered stiffly ; and after only a short pause he went on : " Do let me say how glad I am that they have given you the Wavertree. It was, in my opinion, well deserved. I hope you'll go on and do great things. Of course you have realized the importance of these notes ? "

It hardly seemed credible. She, who a week ago would have given most of her few possessions for such words of commendation as these from Philip, now found herself divided between horror and surprise as she murmured some formula of thanks. Was it impossible to give him a hint—to warn him that his attitude of cold aloofness could not be maintained ? She was unable to resist returning to the charge. " Mrs. Gray is consulting the police—about Irma, I mean."

Armitage was writing in a pocket note-book, his eyes fixed upon what he was taking down. Dilys saw the pencil swerve off into a meaningless curve as his hand paused. He said nothing at all. Yet somehow she knew, she felt, that this news had shaken him.

Two or three students came in, talking. Dilys had no choice but to leave the board and go to her seat. Armitage remained where he was for perhaps thirty seconds longer. Then he walked quietly



out of the room, looking at nobody and greeting nobody as he passed—a most unusual thing for him to do.

He had not been long gone before Professor Dalton bustled in and the lecture began.

Dilys heard it as through a muffling curtain. She was shocked, in the real meaning of the term. That Armitage should take up precisely the attitude that he had done—that he should assume a “don’t-care,” “what-business-is-it-of-mine” manner, was so surprising that it bewildered her judgment.

Could Garrie have been mistaken? Was it not, after all, Irma whom he had seen with Armitage at the mill?

She felt thankful that she was to meet Garrie that afternoon and would hear from him the truth. If it were true, if he was certain that he had not made a mistake, then she winced from what seemed to be the natural presumption—namely, that Armitage had something to conceal.

Armitage! She would have stood up for him against the whole University! She had “made him her master, to live and to die.” . . . But she was just an ignorant girl, knowing nothing of men nor of life. She realized that—owned it candidly and with shame. She had made for herself an image and its feet seemed likely to turn out to be made of something fouler than clay.

With that realization she was shaken for the first time with a great fear for Irma. Hitherto she had assumed that young woman’s complete capacity to

look after herself. She had guessed at a quarrel—at a serious quarrel—and had thought Irma quite capable of going away and leaving no address in order to escape the necessity of meeting the man she had let down. Now she began to recall what she herself had warned Irma of—namely, that Armitage was a man of high temper, capable of terrible fits of rage. . . . Now, how did she, Dilys, know that? . . . for she *had* known it. . . .

For the very first time Dalton had to call her to attention. He had asked a question and she had not heard.

He made some dry allusion to young ladies whose heads were turned by their success; and, upon her flushing scarlet and the eyes of all the class being fixed upon her, announced to them what would be posted up to-morrow on the board: that Miss Pendered had won the Wavertree.

Dil was not widely known among the students. Her natural reserve and her conspicuous lack of funds were both against popularity; and at the Kittery almost all the girls belonged to the Joyce Clarke set—"Do as little work as possible, and go about with the male students as much as you can." To this clique both Dilys and her friend Laura Bradman were definitely opposed, and there was little social intercourse between the two factions, as the Kestrel well knew.

It had been stipulated at the outset of Miss Varick's Gorchester career, by the authorities, that, if permitted to live in rooms, she must dine so many times a week



at the Kittery ; and she had definitely taken up the side of Dilys and Laura against Joyce's crowd. This had been to some extent pleasing to Joyce, because in looks and charm she could not, as she knew, hold a candle to Irma, so that it was a relief not to have to invite her to any of her own 'stunts'. On the other hand, she suspected that many of the young men would not come to her parties because they knew that Miss Varick would certainly not be there.

Faction was, however, forgotten in the delight of all Kittery girls that one of them had gained so coveted a prize as the Wavertree Essay. The Professor enlarged upon his theme, telling them that the prize essay had been vastly ahead of all the others sent up—it had been a case of Pendered first and the rest nowhere. And all the time he was chirping on, Dilys had a picture before her mind's eye of himself and his friend—the Wise Men of Gotham—trundling up to Welwych Mill in their Trojan, and meeting Philip Armitage carrying Irma's fur.

She wanted to laugh and she wanted to cry. Irma was a little wretch ! Why had she chosen to behave like this ? To go away was one thing—not to say you were going was another.

At the end of the lecture Dil walked out of the room without even remembering that she would find Garrie awaiting her, and was sweeping hurriedly along the wide passage when he came running after her, full of gay congratulations.

"See here, Dil," he said, tucking his hand under

her arm, "in view of the circumstances—namely, that you have just done your University proud—it is clearly indicated that this is to be Cousin Garrie's show. Give me the great pleasure of entertaining you on this occasion, won't you?"

"Why, since you put it like that! I expect it was very impudent of me to invite you, but I am feeling a bit desperate, and you're the only person in the wide world that I can mention it to."

"Couldn't be better," was his gratified reply; "and now not a word more about it until we are discussing crumpets and *éclairs*!"

In fact, when they reached the celebrated "Freddie's," where all Gorchester foregathers for morning coffee and afternoon tea, Dil found that a table had been reserved, that all kinds of delicacies had been ordered, and that a little bouquet of carnations lay upon her plate. She was touched.

"Garrie, you're a sport!" said she, thinking, as even the most aloof of girls will, that such attention was pleasant, even if it only came from one's young cousin.

"Glad you put on that stunning frock," was his gleeful answer. "I thought those would look well with it. But it's nonsense to talk about such a trifle as tea, if you consider what I'd do for you if I could—if you would?—"

Her soft, indifferent laugh checked him.

"Don't try to talk as if you were grown up, Garrie!"



"Grown up? What d'you mean, grown up?" cried he with justifiable mortification. "If it comes to that, I'm three years older than you—so there!"

"In years, perhaps. I mean, by the calendar you are. But I am old enough to be your auntie in—in——"

"Yes, my dear, go on! You were about to say 'in knowledge of the world!' Why, my poor girl, the average she-child in the lowest class at the kindergarten knows more of the world than you do."

"You think so? Proof of what I just now said—you're *not* grown up! Why, if you had had, as I have, ever since you were ten, to mother the younger children, do the housework, play the organ, teach in the Sunday school, and all the time consider how an income of four hundred a year is to do the work of eight—well, that's what I have done, and you say I know nothing of the world——"

He was apologetic and explanatory. They burst into a flood of argument, comparing their childish days, and were just about to plunge into a consideration of the future and the things Dalton had said about Dilys' brain, when she pulled herself together with a shock of remembrance.

"Oh, Garrie," she reproached him, "here have we been talking all this while about ourselves, and I brought you here to talk of something so extremely different!"

IT took some time for Dilys to relate to attentive hearer the details of Mrs. Gray's. She had left that lady's presence oppressed suspicion that, although her word was not doubt the fact that she was not telling all she knew had been duly detected and noted.

"I did answer all her questions, and fortunately she gave me a lead by asking if I suspected any *student* in particular. As you know, I don't. I am pretty certain that Armitage is the person who could give information ; and I think you'll agree that it was not possible for me to bring in his name. . . . You see, I felt sure, *then*, that as soon as he knew about Irma—that she had not returned, I mean, and that anxiety is felt about her—he would come forward and explain things."

"Well," said Garrie, haltingly, "of course it's possible that he doesn't yet know that there's anything to explain."

"Exactly what I thought ! It seemed to me that if I could but give him a hint he would jump to it ; and just as I was wondering how that was to be managed, he walked into the empty lecture-room where I was copying notes. When I saw him, the thought flashed, 'What a heaven-sent opportunity !' and, without stopping to think, I plunged. You see, he knows that Irma and I are friends, and so I asked quite innocently whether he had heard that she had not come back from her week-ending."



## MISSING TWO

her listener keenly.

could tell, I could feel in a moment, no news to him—that he knew it before I could also tell that he resented my having led her to him, and that he meant to warn jolly well mind my own business.”

“He was rude?”

“Oh, no; but he answered with the coolest indifference; made some silly prunes-prism remark about week-ends being bad for the term’s work; pretended to know nothing of Irma or her movements! If he had had a moment to reflect, he must have realized that he was taking up the wrong attitude; his line, if he wanted to avert suspicion, would have been a kindly interest, some sympathetic questions, because the whole University is agog about those two, and, though I don’t expect he hears the talk—not much of it anyway—I simply can’t believe that he would suppose his careless indifference would sound natural to me, who know Irma fairly well.”

“M’, yes. He underrated your intelligence, methinks.”

“It annoyed me—so much so that I determined to give him one more prod. So I told him that Mrs. Gray’s anxiety was such that she was calling in the police.”

“That went home?”

“I know it did. He was completely taken aback. He made no comment—said nothing at all, but almost immediately walked out of the room. I’m positive he had meant to stay and hear Dalton’s lecture. He had

his note-book, and I'm sure he had come for that purpose. But he fairly bolted ; and I was so upset by his whole attitude and manner that I hardly heard a word Dalton said, and shall have to borrow your notes, if I may."

"That's all right, of course," said Garrie absently. "Well, but you know, Dil, the question is—what about it? As you are aware, I know for certain that Armitage took Irma to the mill that night. I can swear to it. I know, moreover, that he was most anxious to make me believe that he himself had not been into the mill at all until we went in together. . . . But, you see, he doesn't know that it was not the first time *I* had been in—that I was there by myself just before I met him. As I told you the other day, the fact of his having paid an earlier visit was quite evident the moment I got inside the first time. That two people had been there was obvious at once—clock going, drinks set out, two chairs forward, and what not. When he and I made our entrance he, in ignorance of what I had already seen, struck a match, which only enabled me to see what was just before me, and guided me to the stairs, bidding me hure up to the observatory and get things out while he lit the lamp below. If it hadn't been too late, it was a wise precaution on his part, but in the circs. it was useless. When I was out of the way he hastily tidied up, being even silly enough to stop the clock. . . . But there was one thing he clean missed——"

"Yes—yes?" she breathed as he hesitated.

"I didn't tell you about that when we were talking



on Saturday, because it was—well, because it's a bit beastly. . . and I thought then that I should be hearing an explanation before long ; but I'm going to tell you now."

"Oh, do. I can stand shocks."

He proceeded to relate the story of his accidentally falling, and so discovering the blood upon the rug. Not so much the fact itself but its possible implications turned Dil somewhat pale.

"Oh, Garrie ! But think—think what that might mean !"

"Steady on," he said rather hurriedly. "Of course I know it can't mean *that* . . . but it would be a terminological inexactitude if I said I wasn't tingling all over with the desire to learn the facts. I had been thinking of going to Armitage and making a clean breast of the whole thing. But what you say of the attitude he is taking up makes me wonder." . . .

After a silence, "Do you suppose," murmured Dil, "that he may now have gone off to Mrs. Gray to tell her all he knows ?"

"That's possible, but not, to my mind, likely. The whole episode is so blatantly unlike Armitage—unlike all one knows of him, I mean—that I am growing suspicious. . . . It's so—well, so odd. For example, I left him that night in a state of pretty complete exhaustion. He looked as if he had been rolled in the dirt ; also, as I now know, he had had such a blow on the mouth that two of his teeth were loosened and had to come out the next morning. In fact, I

assumed pretty confidently that he had had an accident, as he told me. Well, now, part of that at least was a lie. He said his car was wonky and he should go straight to bed. I left him there in the mill, and I'm fairly certain there was no one else there, then——"

"No one else there? Why, who was likely to be there?"

"How should I know? I only know that Irma *had* been there. I think I assumed that he had driven her home, and on his way back to the mill, having been turned down and being perhaps half-blind with rage or misery, had had a spill and shaken himself more than a little. . . . But the point I'm trying to make is this: when the two Wise Men of Gotham sailed up in their wooden shoe an hour and a half later, *they saw Armitage, in his car, driving back towards the mill* from the direction of the estuary. They stood by the gate, awaiting him, and when he had parked his car he got out and came towards them, carrying in his hand that reddish-golden fox-fur which Irma has been wearing since the beginning of this term. I had just told them that he had gone to bed dead beat. I point out for your consideration that all these discrepancies, put together, look a bit bad—fishy—what?"

Still very white, Dil murmured her concurrence. "Can't we," she pleaded, "between us, hit on some key to Armie's behaviour? Some reason other than one too awful to contemplate?"

"Oh, well, one can suggest reasons accounting for



—for most of it,” he replied musingly. “What I think the most likely is that there was a third party in the affair. Somebody had got into the mill, so that, when Armie brought Irma up, there was a hidden listener. Say it was a tramp—say it was a rival. It may have been someone who saw possibilities of blackmail in the situation. Probably he didn’t show himself until there had been some tender passages—or at least something that showed those two to be intimate friends—and then made an appearance asking what it would be worth to stop his mouth? Naturally Armie would have gone for him, and you know he’s a bad man to be up against when he’s in a rage. He perhaps knocked him out—may possibly have thrown him down the ladder. Then he would have gone down after him to see that he had done the job thoroughly; and if I’d been in his place I’d have packed the brute into the car and driven him some distance before I decanted him. On his return he would have found Irma in no state to be made love to. She may have demanded to be driven to the railway station at once—I think he had her suit-case aboard his car—so he brought her out, settled her in her place, and then, just as they were going to start off, he heard me arriving (as he thought) in the *Péche*. They, or he, if she wasn’t there with him, must have been there for at least a quarter of an hour, for I had come on the scene unheard, been upstairs, spied what I had spied, and come down again meanwhile. He was in no state to make an appearance before a stranger, but he had to find out who the arrival was,

so he came forward and was relieved to see me rather than anyone else. Doubtless he then realized that he must, if he could, suppress the fact that Irma was or had been there. I believe that she was in the car all the time—that he went back and explained to her in a whisper that he must play up to me and see me off the premises—left her there—and, the moment I had gone, went back to her and drove her off somewhere or other. His luck was pretty dismal, for when he returned for the last time he ran straight into the Men of Gotham. How's that strike you for an attempt at reconstruction?"

"Not bad," said Dil thoughtfully. "It would account for the blood and his agitation and so on. . . . But it doesn't throw any light on what he did with Irma, does it?"

"That's so," replied Garrie, eying her longingly as she sat facing him, her wide eyes full of concern, her lips parted with an expression of sorrow and wonder.

"Oh, doesn't it seem dreadful," she sighed, "to be thinking and talking like this of him! Our great man! It makes me think of the Lost Leader:

We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him  
. . . made him our Master . . .

Garrie, we must, we simply *must*, think of something that will clear him of this!"

"Cheer up! We shall! We can, if we put our heads together," he encouraged her; "and, by the way, an idea occurs to me this minute——"



“ Well ? ”

“ Suppose, just suppose, that old Armie attacked his blighter too fiercely ? We have to remember not only that he’s got a temper of his own, but that, if Irma had just been breaking off the engagement, or words to that effect, he would already have gone off the deep end pretty thoroughly before what the newspapers would call the alleged blackmailer got to work. Just let us put it that he hit harder than he meant—or harder than the chap could stand—and found himself with a corpse on his hands ? What then ? Can you reconstruct his reactions ? What would he have done ? ”

Dil was very white, but she saw that this idea was by no means impossible, and she faced it firmly.

“ What I would have done in his place would be to find a doctor and a policeman as fast as I could.”

“ But he had Irma on his hands. If her presence came into it, and he had to admit that he had killed a man on account of something which the man in question had overheard, I put it to you that he couldn’t do that ? ”

“ No. He had to think of her first.”

“ I suggest that he dragged the corpse into the wood and hid it somewhere, in preparation to driving her away into safety before tackling his problem. My appearance complicated the situation horribly, as, by the time he started, after I had cleared out, they were too late to catch the Exeter express. They could, however, have caught a train to Bath. Irma could

have gone to an hotel there and continued her journey next day. But perhaps on the way she panicked, and she may have felt it wise to stay where she was for a bit and have written to Armie, asking him what she had better do. His main idea would doubtless be to make it certain, in case of inquiry, that she had not been near the mill that night——”

Dil cut in eagerly. “How if they did as you suggest, and then the arrival of the two professors prevented him again from going, as he intended, to find his victim; and suppose that when at last they left him free and he went to the place where he had left the body it was no longer there? Or, at least, he couldn’t find it? Then he would be in a dreadful fix. Either the man had recovered and taken himself off, in which case he constituted a horrid menace——”

“Or somebody else had found him,” Garrie completed her hypothesis for her. “Yes, Dil, that’s quite an idea. You’ve the brain of a best-seller writer. Well, if that was so, and I think it may possibly have been, Armitage had no course at all but to lie low. His rôle would be to pretend complete ignorance, wouldn’t it? He had to fake some kind of accident to account for his having been hit in the mouth, to obliterate all trace of Irma’s drive with him and of her visit to him, and then to sit tight—eh?”

“Garrie, wouldn’t it be fairer if you went to him and told him frankly that you *know* Irma was with him that evening, that he was the last person



to have seen her? If you put it to him he could not deny it, and he must make some kind of explanation. . . . Because, if anyone questions you on the subject you are bound to tell the truth, are you not?"

"I wonder if that's so," he replied thoughtfully. "Anyway, I shall not do anything in a hurry. I want to see how Armitage reacts now that he knows the police are in it. If he took her to the railway station and was seen there with her they are bound to drop on to him, are they not? He may have gone at this very moment to see Mrs. Gray or to lodge some information with the police. We want to keep out of it if we jolly well can—at least I know I do; so for the present let our policy be that of masterly inactivity. Agree to that, partner?"

Dil agreed.

When Philip Armitage abruptly left the lecture-hall and hastened along towards his rooms, he was astonished to find that his mind, instead of being filled with the images which of late had obsessed it, was dwelling upon the look in a girl's eyes.

Not that he had lacked opportunity of gazing into girls' eyes since he became a professor at Gorchester. Eyes of every shade and size and shape had been offered daily for his inspection. Eyes dancing for glee at his praise, swimming in tears at his blame; eyes that sought his own in the fervent hope of some kind

of response from his masculinity to their masked—or unmasked—sex appeal. All these had he seen ; and he had seen the light of conscious power in the eyes that had driven him mad—the “come-hither” that no man had so far resisted when Irma Varick chose to try her charms. Never had he been called upon to face the probing of wide, candid eyes that called him, as it were with a challenge, “Come forth !” He had felt like Adam, hiding from the Lord God among the trees of his garden. . . .

They were the loveliest eyes he had ever seen ; and they were accusing him. “What hast thou done ?”

So might he feel, it seemed, when arraigned before God’s bar of justice.

Never once, since first she became his pupil, had the Welsh girl given him any look but that of the eager student, seeking knowledge from the trusted teacher. Never until to-day ; but to-day she had been so intent upon her own object that she had forgotten her customary caution. For a moment she had shown him her soul—the soul of the pitying yet avenging angel ; and it had shaken him so that he did not see how he could meet it again.

He had not dreamed that the human eye could express so much. He realized that the cause of the tremendous effect upon him of that unspoken message was that, on the girl’s side, it had been completely unconscious.

Your tall, pale mother, with her talking eyes——



Old Browning had the exact word—*talking eyes*. . . . In all probability he should never see just that look again in the eyes of Dilys Pendered !

At a street corner he turned swiftly upon hearing his name called, and saw the anxiously cordial yet perturbed countenance of Miss Hawke, who was holding out her hand to him.

“ Oh, Professor, I am so glad to see you. I am in such trouble. Why, how ill you’re looking——”

“ Oh, I’m all right—had a nasty bout of the dentist, that’s all. And what is your trouble ? ”

She proceeded to tell him of the unaccountable absence of Irma. “ You know,” she said, “ if it were one of these harum-scarum girls, or one of the vague type of many of our students without any real culture or breeding, I should not be so alarmed ; but Irma, considering the special temptation that her beauty must cause her, is so discreet, so invariably well-behaved, one cannot help fearing——”

“ Oh, Miss Hawke, I don’t think you need worry yourself about Miss Varick,” was the dry reply. “ Her friend, Miss Pendered, is also working herself up into a state of nerves about it. A charming girl, Miss Pendered—eh ? Well, as I was saying, I have always considered Miss Varick to be one who is quite capable of looking after herself. I feel confident that in a day or two she will write and let you know her reasons for her apparent discourtesy.”

This point of view evidently made an impression upon the Kestrel. “ Do you really think so ? ” she gasped. “ We are in such doubt, Mrs. Gray and I,

as to what steps to take. You see, there are no near relatives. I have never felt that Mrs. Bennett, the aunt in London, cared much for Irma; and Miss Bond at Ivybridge is elderly and not well off. Mrs. Gray wrote yesterday to Professor Varick at Evian-les-Bains. Ah, if only they had been in Gorchester they could have shouldered the responsibility for us! You see, these police inquiries cost money." . . .

"If you really want my advice, Miss Hawke, you will take no further steps until you hear from the Varicks. It is possible (though I own unlikely) that Miss Varick may have gone out to join them. If she has got into some difficulty and is rather afraid of the consequences, that is what she might do. Don't you think so?"

"Why, indeed, Professor Armitage, I am inclined to hope you may be right. Oh, what you say reassures me somewhat. As you point out, Irma is extremely competent, and she has money to go wherever she wishes——"

"Before calling in the police, why not go to her bank and see if she has drawn out any considerable cheque lately—any sum that looks as if she meant to go travelling?"

"Would they let me?"

"Considering that she is in your charge, if you saw the manager privately I think he might."

"You do? I am so glad I appealed to you—a man often——"

"Excuse my interrupting, but in the case of a girl of good social standing I should be loath to have a



police inquiry except in the last resort. It is not always tactful, and it is always very public. Forgive my haste. Good day. I hope your anxiety will soon be relieved."

### CHAPTER XIII      MISS HAWKE PERPLEXED

LESS than five minutes after parting with Armitage, Miss Hawke encountered Professor Dalton, accompanied by his daughter Bridget, a plump, bespectacled student.

The lady warden of the Kittery was in that state of mind in which one pours out one's sorrows to anyone who will listen. She was also not without hope of collecting some evidence in this way which might throw light upon the mystery.

She found that Irma's disappearance was news to both the Daltons. Bridget, being a home-student, did not come much into contact with those girls who did not belong to her own section.

Professor Dalton seemed inclined to take a more serious view of the matter than had Armitage. "Dear, dear, it sounds like an elopement," said he, shaking his head. "The fact of her sending her aunt a telegram not to expect her shows that her absence is intentional, does it not? I mean, it rules out any suspicion of accident or—or foul play?"

“ Oh, but suppose it was not she who sent it ?  
• Anyone can write a telegram——”

“ Ah, true ! At what time do you say it was dispatched ? ”

“ That I don't know. Miss Bond received it at about half-past eight, and it had been handed in at Gorchester.”

“ And at what time did Miss Varick leave her rooms ? ”

Miss Hawke explained the unlucky absence of the Jenkinses on the evening of the departure, and also, in reply to a question or two, recounted Irma's proceedings on the Friday afternoon as far as she knew them.

“ Why,” said Bridget, beaming through her round spectacles like a benevolent owlet, “ of course Professor Armitage is the person to ask, because, as you know, dad, he and she are supposed to be engaged, and if she was going away for the week-end they would almost certainly meet to say good-bye.”

“ *What ?* ” almost shrieked Miss Hawke on a high note of incredulity. “ *Professor Armitage*, you say ? Oh, no, Bridget, you are quite mistaken about that, for he knows nothing whatever ; I have just this moment been asking him.”

Professor Dalton chuckled. “ Told you that, did he ? Looks to me a bit suspicious. I fancy he may know more than he is willing to let out——”

“ Oh, Mr. Dalton——” gasped the poor lady, shocked beyond measure at the new knowledge she was acquiring.



"Well, there is something I may as well tell you," he said, still with a twinkle in his eye. "Do you know the old mill on Welwych Uplands, where Armitage has a telescope?"

"I have not been there, but I have heard of it."

"My friend Streeter and I drove up there on Friday night. I may as well own that it was very late, past midnight. Streeter is—er—well, he is a 'big noise,' as Biddy would say, in astronomy, and we went up to make an observation. I pay part of the rent of the mill and have my own key——"

"Yes, yes?"

"I had been told that I should find Armitage up there—you may remember what a grand night it was—and young Ord, who had been taking an observation for me earlier, said Armitage was spending the night in the mill. But when we drove up, Armitage himself was just arriving, or rather, I gather, returning, in his car. We both assumed that he had been driving with some young lady, for he had in his hand——"

"What had he in his hand?"

"A bit of fur. What young ladies when I was a boy called a boa—I don't know what they call it now—a bit of fur you wear round your neck, evidently left in the car by mistake."

"A bit of fur," murmured Miss Hawke in a shaky voice. "I suppose I can't expect a man to say what it was like?"

"You do me injustice, dear lady, for although the

light was bad the colour was conspicuous—a kind of orange.”

“Irma has one like it,” pounced the Kestrel. “It was sent to her from Canada. I told her I disliked the colour, but it is a valuable piece of fur. . . . However, I assure you that she cannot—she *cannot* have been with Professor Armitage that night, for he knew nothing of her absence until he was told——”

“Well, if he doesn’t know anything about it, nobody else does,” commented Bridget stolidly. “Surely, Miss Hawke, you know that they are always about together?”

Evidently Miss Hawke knew nothing of the kind. “But he gave me the impression just now of neither knowing nor caring to hear anything of the matter. Only he was against our applying to the police.”

“Have you asked any of the girls about it?” Bridget wished to know.

“Mrs. Gray sent at once for Dilys Pendered, who sees more of Irma than any of the others, I believe. She gave no hint of there being anything between Irma and Professor Armitage.”

“If I were you,” returned Bridget, “I would ask the girls—any of your girls at the hostel. Why, there have been bets as to how soon the engagement would be announced.”

The Professor, who had been reflecting, spoke suddenly. “There is something odd about all this. I said just now that it looked like an elopement; but,



in the name of all that is reasonable, why should Irma Varick elope when there is nothing at all to hinder her being married openly to whomsoever she may wish? You take my point? She is her own mistress, the University might dislike her leaving, but they could not stop it. Sounds unreasonable to me. But, even if you suppose that, like Lydia Languish, she has a romantic complex and was determined upon elopement, then there is one thing which is quite clear and certain, and that is that her partner is not Armitage. Girls do not elope alone, and we have my daughter's word—which I for one trust—that it is the common talk of the University that Armitage and she are either engaged or on the brink of an engagement. Now Armitage declares that he knows nothing of her whereabouts. It strikes one as possible that she has bolted with someone else, and has chosen this method of going in order to avoid a quarrel with her avowed lover. In that case——”

“But, father, that doesn't in the least explain why she should be causing all this anxiety to Miss Hawke? I don't think Irma is a cruel girl, and she has always seemed to me to have good manners. Surely when she was once safely off she would send a message, even if she did not give her address?”

“That is so, of course; but my point is I think the important one—*who is her companion?* No one among the students, I am fairly sure. Certainly not from the science side. Parry or I would soon hear of that——”

“Well, father, you have to go and see Dr. Strom

this afternoon ; you might ask him the question as regards the students on his side."

"My dear, I told you at breakfast-time that Strom has a week's leave of absence, representing the University at the Lisbon conference. Granville is taking over his work until Monday next. Of course Granville would know. I can go and ask him at once, if Miss Hawke would like?"

"Indeed I should be most grateful! If—if Irma has—has *jilted* Professor Armitage, he may very likely be feeling sore and unwilling to mention her name——"

"And, if you'll take my advice, you will advise Mrs. Gray not to call in the police until I have made inquiries of Granville and have interviewed Armitage himself. He and I are good friends, and, with the evidence of that fur I saw him carrying, he can't very well object to a few questions from me."

Miss Hawke shook hands with pathetic gratitude, and gladly promised to advise Mrs. Gray to take no further step for the moment. "The only thing I don't understand," said she, "is that Dilys Pendered, when we had her up, gave no hint of what Bridget now tells me——"

"One can understand that, I think," replied Dalton, twinkling through his big curved lenses. "He is her Professor and special tutor. She would not feel herself at liberty to mention such gossip to Mrs. Gray."

"Of course that is so. Mrs. Gray felt sure that



she was hiding *something*—that she was not being quite frank. But she is such a truthful girl——”

So saying the Kestrel hurried away, leaving the Professor more disturbed than he showed himself.

“I don’t like this, Bridget,” said he abruptly. “Of all the men in the University, Armitage is the one I would have gone bail for. But there was something queer about him that night. He had the fur in his hand—he was odd in his manner.”

“Well, pater,” said his daughter sensibly, “I think I should have been a bit odd in manner if I had been (as you say he had) showing the telescope to a lot of people, and felt as tired as could be, wanting to go to bed. . . . Then you two came sailing up in the small hours, getting out all that he had put away and preventing him from settling down. In his place, I should probably have told you to go to a warmer place than Welwych Moor!”

“Some truth in that,” he owned with candour. “It was probably an error of judgment on my part to take Streeter there so late; but it seemed such a chance to confute him, because he really is a big gun, you know. Well, I’ll hurry home and get into touch with Granville.”

Miss Hawke did not, after all, question Dilys again that night.

Professor Dalton rang her up a couple of hours later and told her that as far as could be ascertained there was no male member of the University missing. If Irma had eloped it had been with someone unknown.

That being so, there seemed no object in finding out more of the exact relations existing between Irma and Armitage, since he was certainly in Gorchester and had not been away from his post.

That night, just as the perplexed lady warden was thinking of going up to bed, Dalton rang up once more and begged her to let him come round and see her, as he had interviewed Armitage and wanted to consult her.

In much agitation, Miss Hawke bade him come, and admitted him herself, taking him to her little sitting-room.

Evidently he was considerably perturbed. He told her that he had been to see Armitage, and had put to him bluntly the fact that it seemed to be the idea among the students that he and Irma Varick were engaged. Armitage had met the charge with a blank denial.

"He was very stiff," said the little round professor, blinking apologetically through his strong glasses. "He seemed to resent my questions. He asked who had said such a thing, and I replied that, as far as I could gather, it was the general belief. He was rather cutting, saying that he wondered at my letting myself listen to gossip of that kind. He told me that if what I wanted was his official contradiction I could have it. I put it to him that the girl was missing and that it was only natural that I should make inquiries of the person who, according to my information, knew most about the matter. He replied that if nobody knew more of the matter than he did we must be sadly in



need of information. I then told him—I should say I reminded him—that when Streeter and I encountered him late on Friday he had in his hand a piece of fur which you recognized on my description as being the property of Miss Varick. He fired up at that, and was most indignant. He denied that he had had a neck-fur in his hand ; he declared that it was a fox's mask and brush. He said his married sister had got it, hunting with the Quorn, that she had sent it to him to decorate the wall of his mill, and that he had had it mounted in London. He added that if I so desired I could see it there, on the wall where he had now fixed it." . . .

The kindly little man paused and wiped his brow. "I have the highest opinion of Armitage, and I could not tell him I didn't believe him. But, for all that, I didn't. I am more than puzzled—I am distressed. Armitage looks very ill. He is evidently suffering, and just as evidently he is firmly determined to remain silent. He has had trouble with his teeth, he tells me, and he had such splendid-looking teeth ; it is rather surprising. Altogether, the thing is disturbing, and I hardly know what to advise. One does not want police publicity, of course . . . but these private detectives are not as a rule particularly refined ; and also their fees are high."

Miss Hawke grew rigid, staring in horror. "You think—you believe," she stammered, "that there must be a formal inquiry?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I can only tell you that I have received the distinct impression that

Armitage is concealing something that he ought to reveal."

She hid her eyes for a minute with her hand. "There are inquiries that ought to be made at once—inquiries that I feel should have been made to-day," she faltered. "As to the train Irma caught, for example. She is so lovely, railway porters and so on are pretty sure to remember her. Also that telegram to Ivybridge, we ought to find out where it came from. Miss Bond did not send it on to us—she may have destroyed it—but if we knew the office from which it was dispatched, we might find out at least if Irma sent it herself. . . . And there is someone else one ought to interview. . . . While I was sitting here alone it came into my mind. Miss Ord's nephew—that bonny-looking youngster—he is your pupil, Professor, I think—and I understood you to say that he was up at the mill on Friday night?"

Dalton nodded. "I'll get hold of him first thing to-morrow morning, but I am practically certain that he knows nothing. He and Armitage together made a most careful observation for me that night, using the telescope for about an hour. Nobody else was there at the time; I know that much. However, I will do all I can; he may have some scrap of news that may be important for us, little as he may guess it."

"And to-morrow morning we ought to hear from Evian from Professor Varick—or possibly from the naughty girl herself. . . . Oh, God grant it!" said the Kestrel, and her prayer was almost a sob.



THE following morning, which was Thursday, found Dilys in her place in the organic chemistry laboratory trying hard to apply her mind wholly to the difficult piece of work set her by Dalton, but unable to restrain her unruly fancy, which roamed and played continually around the thought of Irma and her vanishing. Somewhere, in what she knew of the affair, there was something that did not fit—a discrepancy for which she could not account.

The telegram showed that Irma had made an arrangement which she did not mean to keep for a visit to Miss Bond. She had also succeeded in conveying to the Kestrel the impression that she had spent the former week-end also at Ivybridge, when it seemed there had been no question of her doing so. . . . And yet, knowing even as much as she did of Irma, Dilys was convinced that her behaviour when the girls lunched together was not quite compatible with such conduct. She could not make herself believe that when Irma spoke of her approaching break with Armitage and her intention of reforming she was contemplating an entirely unexplained disappearance.

Dalton had set Dilys upon a new course of very advanced work since her Wavertree Essay had aroused in him the hope of a distinguished degree for her. She was feeling that this work was too much for her; that she could not continue it without special coaching, which she knew to be beyond her means.

A shadow fell upon her desk and she looked up with a start to see Philip Armitage standing there, looking down upon her with his usual aspect of grave interest.

They exchanged greetings, and he began to ask her how she liked the suggested new course upon which she had just embarked. She had to confess that at present she was more or less astray, and was feeling bothered by the thought that Professor Dalton would be disappointed.

"I really came round," said Armitage kindly, "to find out how you stood; and to ask whether some extra tuition would be acceptable? Of course, I mean in a friendly way—not as a matter of business. I am interested in your work, and should like to have a hand in the shaping of it. I know I could help you if you would allow me."

Astonishment held Dilys mute. Colour which she could not control rushed to her sweet, pale face. Armitage saw those eyes lifted once more to his, and this time in lovely contrast to the unwonted carmine caused by his unexpected words. He saw the eagerness, the incredulous delight which his generous suggestion at once kindled; but also he saw—or believed he saw—mistrust.

There was an echo of yesterday—a doubt, not of his offer but of him. Into his inner soul sprang the determination to kill the doubt, to conquer the allegiance of this exceptional girl.

"Will you be working this afternoon?" he asked in the serenest of voices, holding her fascinated gaze



with the wide eyes, which looked so blue in his tanned face.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Then I shall come at three o'clock and give you an hour, if you are willing."

She veiled her own eyes with downcast lids as she tried to express something of her thanks.

"Dalton put it into my head," he said quietly, as though brushing away the idea of any personal motive. "He was telling us yesterday that there might be financial obstacles to your having full training, and hinted that it was up to us all to help if we could. I'm able, as it happens, to give the time; and if I may say so, I am more than willing."

"You are very good. I may as well confess that I was feeling quite helpless," she replied with a slight smile. She would have been surprised to know how keenly that smile was noticed. Philip Armitage was perceiving, as it were for the first time, how beautifully the not very red mouth was moulded—a mouth that might be eloquent, formed for speech, but formed for kissing too.

"I can't see how I can thank you. I ought not to accept such kindness——"

"There won't be any question of thanking. I am confident that the result will overpay me," he replied in his very nicest manner. It was so completely the master-to-pupil manner that it went far to kill her doubt of him.

He stayed long enough to make a few illuminating remarks, then inquired if his suggestion of work that

afternoon was convenient. She replied that it was her intention to work every day and all day long in order to try and keep abreast of what lay before her.

"Then I'll be here at three," he replied, "and give you an hour. That suit?"

She assured him that it would, and he at once moved off, stopping farther down the room to seat himself by a male student in difficulties, and give valuable help. His whole aspect and manner were so normal that had it not been for the purple marks of sleeplessness under his eyes Dilys would have thought that nothing had happened to him.

The influence which his personality had always exerted over her flooded her once more. She was lifted up into a wonderful world in which everything became possible; she had won the Wavertree—she was to have private coaching from Philip Armitage! If anyone had told her these marvellous tidings a week ago she would have thought life had little more to offer. Yet now there was a poison lurking somewhere: the poison of knowing that both this man and her friend Irma were liars. Philip, she felt sure, was playing a part, trying to show the world that all was just as usual; and Garrie and she knew that this was not true. There was a hateful, lurking wonder lest he might be giving her special attention with a view to suggesting that a special friendship existed between them, which would have the effect of making rumours concerning himself and Irma look improbable.

His demeanour when he duly walked into the lab. that afternoon went far to chase such an idea, which



she vehemently told herself was unworthy both of herself and of him. He was the keen, almost hard master of a promising pupil who needed a lot of coaching. Under the influence of this strictness she settled down much more happily ; and at the end of the hour exclaimed ingenuously that she could not believe it had been as long. He laughed indulgently.

"I gave you a pretty good gruelling too ! I mustn't overdrive the willing horse ! A man I know once said that in his class he had to drive all the girls with a curb and all the men with a spur ! I see that I shan't need the spur with you much, at least !"

She owned with gratitude that she had been all at sea that morning, ready to tell Dalton that he had pushed her up too high and must take her down again, but that now she began to see her way, thanks entirely to the help given.

"Good !" he said as he collected his material ; "and now go for a run and clear your head. Tomorrow I'll bring the car and give you a breath of air after this severe discipline."

Without waiting for her acceptance or refusal of this suggestion he was off, leaving her once more with a stirring of her former perturbation.

Her feeling for him had reached the stage at which his physical nearness counted for much ; and the hint that his interest in her did not cease with the end of the lesson set her pulses beating.

As she put on her hat and went out into the park which surrounds the scientific laboratory building she began to school herself. "If you're going on like a

lovesick flapper every time this man comes near you, good-bye to your chances," she told herself sourly. "Pull yourself together, girl, and try to be normal. You know you're not really in love with him, only fascinated. He'll help you over your fences, and we'll leave it at that, if you please."

In spite of his advice to her to take exercise, she went straight back to the Kittery, thinking that she would get Laura to make tea and then go with her for a little walk before starting to write out her notes of to-day's lectures.

Laura was quite as excited as she had hoped at the wondrous news of Armie's offer to coach her gratis; but their talk was most unpleasingly cut short before they had done their tea by a summons from Miss Hawke, who wished to see Dilys at once.

"More catechizing," sighed Laura. "You'll wish you had never seen Varick before you've done."

"Well, I've nothing more to tell them," replied Dilys crossly. "I had absolutely no idea she meant to bolt, and I have told them so ever so many times already."

Miss Hawke received Dilys in her own sitting-room, and not formally in her office.

"Sit down, my dear," she said kindly. "I want to tell you what has happened so far with regard to this wretched matter of Irma Varick's disappearance. I think you know I wrote a long and detailed letter to Professor and Mrs. Varick at Evian. This morning I had a telegram from them saying they had no news from her and the police were to be called in at



once and asked to trace her, but if possible without publicity.'

The Kestrel went on to say that she had thereupon rung up the Superintendent, and he very kindly and sensibly rang up the Chief Constable, Colonel Borrow, who, being a personal friend of Professor Varick, had promised to do all he could with discretion and promptitude.

"And he has found out something——"

"Very little at present, except that her absence is without doubt not merely voluntary but premeditated. Their first action was to trace the telegram, which of course should have been done before, but I feared the post office would not let me see it. However, the police found out in a few minutes that Irma herself had sent the message. It is in her own handwriting; in fact, the girl at the office just at the corner of Houston Square says she handed it in herself about ten minutes to eight. The Colonel and the Superintendent then went to the Jenkinses and questioned them. They could throw no further light on the matter. I believe Colonel Borrow looked over the contents of Irma's writing-bureau, but found nothing but notes and receipts and so on. One or two unpaid bills—nothing to suggest that she did not intend to return."

"Miss Hawke, I'm perfectly *certain* that she intended to return," said Dilys earnestly. "I've been thinking over every word she said to me that day, and I *know* she was not on the brink of saying a final good-bye."

"Quite so. I am inclined to think so; but what

became of her? The police went on to the railway station, not only the main station but Upper Gorchester also. As you know, there are very few trains from the upper station in the late evening, and it was soon ascertained that she had made no departure thence; but at the main station also the porters are positive she did not travel that night—certainly not by the nine o'clock express. She always travels first-class and is in the habit of giving the most extravagant tips. All the porters know her and her elegant luggage. They fall over each other to take her things.

“The police feel sure that she went away by car and not by train from either station, but they went to every garage and every taxicab rank without discovering who drove her. Certainly she did not ring up for a taxi from Houston Square. The inference therefore is that she was called for in a private car. In a place like Houston Square one can hardly think that she could have left, luggage and all, without being seen by somebody; but, as it happens, the folks next door saw nothing of her going; and it does not seem possible for the police to inquire more widely without publicity which we wish to avoid. Colonel Borrow says that if we advertised or broadcast, or both, we should most likely find somebody who was passing and who might have noticed a car; but so far we have not taken any steps, because the fact that she went intentionally and of her own free-will seems to be established.”

“But surely,” cried Dilys, “she would have let



you know? She would not go off and leave us to imagine all kinds of wild things about her, would she? After all, if she had determined to leave Gorchester nobody could have prevented her, could they? You might have declined to receive her back, but you would be much more likely to do that if she went off as she has done, without leave or notice. No, Miss Hawke, I feel certain that something has happened to her—something she didn't expect—wasn't prepared for. She probably intended to go off for the week-end somewhere, knew she would not get leave unless she invented a story much as she did in fact invent. By-the-bye, was Sister Clarissa really staying with Miss Bond?"

"No, she was not," admitted Miss Hawke, whose eyes were bulging with alarm.

"She just covered up her tracks as carefully as she could, meaning to be back on Monday and nobody the wiser," went on Dil. "Surely that must be the explanation—some accident has happened to her——"

"But—but even in that case she would have written—sent a message of some kind," panted Miss Hawke, "unless—unless the accident was *fatal*. . . . And if it were, if she was motoring and was—*killed*, which God forbid, her address, her name would have been on her. You think so, don't you?"

Dilys shrugged her shoulders, thinking with shuddering of bloodstains on a rug. "Who can say?"

"Oh, Dilys, my dear girl, if you have any suspicion—if you have even the glimmer of an idea as to who could have been her companion—surely it is your duty

to tell me ! . . . Yes, yes, I know all this nonsense that is going about—the whole University is full of talk about her and Professor Armitage. Well, you needn't assure me that that is manifestly absurd, for here is the Professor among us, going about his work as usual, and I have his own word for it that *he* does not know where she is. . . . But can you make no other suggestion? You may be certain that your name should not appear in the matter; I would solemnly promise that! Only, I conjure you, if you know of any affair in which she was involved with some other man let us share your knowledge."

Dilys gravely declared that she had no inkling of any other affair except that with Professor Armitage, which was, as Miss Hawke said, common knowledge; and there was the indisputable fact that Irma had disappeared and Philip Armitage was still at his post. Apparently he himself had assured Miss Hawke that he knew nothing of the matter. It seemed there was nothing therefore to be done—nothing that she, Dilys, could feel called upon to say. It was Garrie and not she who had seen the two together on the night of the disappearance. If anyone spoke it must be he, and Dil could well understand his reluctance to do so.

Yet she felt that some move must be made to ascertain Irma's fate. "Surely, Miss Hawke, you are not going to let it go at that?" she faltered hesitatingly. "I give it you as my own belief that Irma only meant to play a prank. She did mean to disappear for the week-end, so that nobody knew where she was, but I do *not* believe that she meant to stay



away altogether. Something has happened to her. Could you tell Colonel Borrow that I am sure of that?"

There was a knock at the door. "If you are not too much engaged, miss"—the respectable voice of Baynes, head waitress at the Kittery—"Colonel Borrow would like to speak to you." She handed in a card on a salver. There was a note pencilled on the card :

Something has been picked up in the Estuary. Don't want to alarm you unnecessarily but I think you had better see it.

The poor Kestrel turned a bluish purple.

"Show the Colonel in at once," said she, "and you, Dilys"—handing her the card—"had better wait. I should wish him to hear what you have just been saying to me."

## CHAPTER XV WHAT THEY FOUND IN THE WATER

THE Chief Constable, military, distinguished-looking and middle-aged came in, followed by Hayes, the local Superintendent, who carried a small tin box. Having shaken hands with Miss Hawke, Colonel Borrow proceeded to explain that a small object had been picked up by a boatman from the

water, a good way down the estuary. As there were initials upon it, the police, to whom the finder most fortunately carried it, brought it at once to him, and as soon as he saw it he thought it possible that it might be a clue to their mystery, and had it with him in the hope that it could be identified.

From the flat tin box was produced an oblong object, limp, discoloured and damp from recent immersion, but still to be recognized as a pochette. It was widely open, showing two pockets lined with what had been rose-pink silk, but was now a sticky mess of streaky drab, the buckram stiffening having adhered to it. The Colonel turned it over, displaying outer sides of black brocade edged with gold tinsel braid about half an inch wide. It was ornamented with coloured embroidery of tiny blossoms escaping from a cornucopia of gilt thread ; and a monogram, also in gilt thread, now almost black but still legible as the twisted letters " I. V."

Miss Hawke uttered a stifled cry. " Her initials ! "

" Yes. Not common ones. That is why I brought it to you at once. Can you identify it ? "

" N-no, I'm afraid I can't . . . I don't remember to have seen it. . . . But perhaps Miss Pendered can. Come here, Dilys, let me introduce Colonel Borrow. Dilys Pendered and Irma were great friends, Colonel. Do you recognize this, my dear ? "

Dilys did not touch the pitiful object held out to her. She put her hands behind her back and nodded, colouring deeply. " I made it," said she with a gasp. " I gave it to Irma last Christmas."



There was a tingling silence. At last the Colonel said, "This puts rather a different complexion on things—eh? Looks as though there had been an accident, or—er—I suppose Miss Varick was not a girl likely to commit suicide, was she?"

Dilys made a small scornful sound.

He turned to her and surveyed her with interest. "You think not?"

"I should regard it as out of the question. She was in love with life—the gayest creature—with everything to make the world delightful——"

"Judging by her picture, a bit of a beauty—eh?"

"Oh, she was the acknowledged belle of the University."

Miss Hawke had partially recovered her voice. "The case there—the pochette," she croaked—"was it quite empty?"

"When the fisherman found it, quite empty—floating wide open, flat as you see it now."

"It might have been flung in to—to get rid of it, do you think?" queried the lady. "Or have fallen from her hand; or—or—— Oh, Colonel, how *do* you think it got into the water?"

"It's not a question on which I've formed any opinion at present," he replied quickly; "but at least it seems to show that Miss Varick was in the neighbourhood of the water recently. Perhaps she was ferried over to Wales and dropped it overboard accidentally? There are many possible explanations, but it is a great mistake to jump to a tragic conclusion without far more evidence than we at present possess."

However, as this young lady is able so positively to identify the thing, it does give us a bit of a lead. If you'll excuse us, the Superintendent and I will get busy——"

As they moved towards the door, Superintendent Hayes turned and asked wistfully, "Still no publicity desired, madam?"

Miss Hawke wrung her hands. "Not if it can possibly be avoided," she moaned; "but I must leave it to Colonel Borrow. He must act as he thinks best. I know the Varicks would agree."

"We can make pretty exhaustive inquiries without letting in the Press," he soothed her. "But it may come to that. It all seems to resolve itself into the question, Who last saw Miss Varick? If someone will tell me that I can get on." He spoke a few words to the Superintendent, who nodded and with a bow to the ladies left the room. When he had gone the Chief Constable sat down, took out a note-book and continued, "The Jenkinses left her in her own rooms at Houston Square about a quarter to eight. She must have gone out immediately afterwards to dispatch that telegram, which we know she did herself. After that, did she return to her rooms? She must have done, for her luggage disappeared. Beyond that—silence; all the same, to dispose of a lively girl, and of her luggage as well, is no easy job, Miss Hawke. If anyone had attempted to do it by stealth or by force, I think we must have heard of it by now. This discovery of the pochette is by no means incompatible with the young lady's having decamped, for some



reason of which we know nothing. From what you tell me, I judge her to be one well able to keep her own counsel."

"She is that," replied Dilys firmly. "Oh, yes, she is. I knew her as well as anyone, yet I had no idea—I have no idea now—of what she meant to do or where she meant to go. But I tell you once again it is my deep conviction that something happened to her that night—something that she didn't expect—something, I should guess, that deprived her of the power of letting anybody know where she was. Remember, she is not an average girl—she's a girl who can send men crazy. She's a Helen of Troy. I've told her more than once that she was for ever playing with fire, and would push someone too far—and it looks to me as though she had."

Colonel Borrow nodded, his eyes resting gravely on the speaker. He was evidently struck both by Dilys and by what she said. "I gather," he said, "that you have already told Miss Hawke all you know of your friend's intentions at the time of your last seeing her?"

"She told me," said Dil slowly, "that it was her intention to turn over a new leaf. She said she was going to become very steady, and she complained that the attention she received from the men students prevented her from working and that it must be put a stop to."

"Did she suggest how she could achieve that?"

"Going into a nunnery," said Dil, with that wonderful small smile of hers.

“H'mph! They had to do that now and then in the Middle Ages, but I should not have thought it a necessary course in these days of liberty for ladies.”

“She decided against it because she did not think the nuns would allow her to read detective novels in bed,” added Dilys demurely. “She seemed to think that put it out of the question.”

The Colonel laughed outright. “She doesn't sound like a would-be suicide.”

“I told you that, mainly to show you that such an idea in connection with her is preposterous,” replied Dilys earnestly. She rose as she spoke. “I am afraid I must go, Miss Hawke, please—I have so much work to get through to-night——”

“Just so. Go, my dear,” said the Kestrel, who could see how profoundly the production of the pochette had agitated the girl.

Colonel Borrow held out his hand, and as Dilys put hers into it he detained her. “One moment, Miss—er—Pendered. I gather that you are on decidedly friendly terms with Miss Varick? Yes? Well, surely you must have an inkling—can't you make a suggestion? Something—anything—to put us on the track of what she meant to do that night, where she was going, with whom she was going?”

Dilys felt that she must answer this appeal so far as the answer lay within her own knowledge. She replied firmly, “All that I can say I have already said to Miss Hawke. I believe Irma to have been engaged to be married to one of our professors here



—Professor Armitage—but Miss Hawke is sure I am mistaken about this ; and, as anyone can see, Irma did not run off with him, because he is here at his post in the University.”

“ If she did not run off *with* him, can she have run *from* him ? ” mused the Colonel, rubbing his chin with one knuckle.

“ The whole thing is moonshine in my opinion,” said Miss Hawke irritably. “ Both Professor Dalton and I have questioned Mr. Armitage and he knows nothing about her. I do not believe that Dilys is right. I think that Irma had some affair which she was most anxious to keep dark, and that she perhaps used her flirtation with the Professor to cover it—to mislead gossip.”

“ That is quite possible,” replied Dilys at once. “ I do not know if I am betraying confidence in telling you that she said to me that afternoon that she did not intend to marry Professor Armitage.”

“ Dilys, you never told me that before ! ”

“ No, Miss Hawke. You thought the whole story was exaggerated gossip and could have nothing to do with what has happened. So I just left it.”

“ H’m ! Look as if he might have got the push that evening,” mused Colonel Borrow. “ I suppose you don’t happen to know what Armitage was doing that night, Miss Hawke ? ”

“ But I most certainly do, Colonel ! Please credit me with having taken at least *some* steps in this matter ! He was up at his observatory—the old mill on Welwych Moor—you know it was a perfect night for star-gazing,

and he was letting people use his telescope. Professor Dalton saw him up there and spoke to him about it afterwards—I mean, he asked him if he had been out with Miss Varick that night and he was quite indignant about it—young Armitage I mean; as indeed he was when I told him that Miss Varick had not returned from her week-end. He said he knew nothing of her movements; and if you come to think of it, she went away from Gorchester that very evening—she couldn't have been star-gazing up on the Moor, could she?"

"It doesn't sound very likely," replied the Colonel a little absent-mindedly. He held the door for the impatient Dilys, who slipped out and fairly ran as soon as she was outside the door to try and get Garrie on the telephone.

When she was gone the Colonel turned with an odd look to Miss Hawke. "I can't help thinking that this is ground which we ought to explore," said he gravely. "This attractive girl has disappeared. She is, so her friend states, the kind of girl to drive men to extremes. The man with whom her name is seriously coupled—the only man, in fact, whose name I've heard mentioned in connection with her own—denies all knowledge. That's odd, I think, on the face of it. One would picture him distracted with anxiety. H'm! Does he often go up to this observatory, do you know?"

"I have no positive knowledge, but I should think not often," replied Miss Hawke, who was now considerably upset. "Why, you don't suppose——"



“Dear lady, I don’t suppose anything at all ; I just try to get at facts. Please may I ask you to say nothing as yet—not even to Mrs. Gray—about what you and I have just heard ? Oh, yes, show her the pochette, of course ; but say nothing at all which might set her mind working upon what may turn out to be quite a false trail. I mean to make some very private inquiries to-morrow, and I’ll report to you if I get even the glimmer of a light.”

As for Dilys, she went straight off and rang up Garrie. Her effort was useless. He was out, and so was Aunt Ag. Both were dining out, so the maid said, and they were not coming home to change ; she thought they had driven to the house of Miss Griffin, a cousin who lived near Wells, and would not be home until bedtime.

Thus deprived of the relief of telling Garrie about the pochette, or about Colonel Borrow and his questions, Dil prepared to fling herself into an evening of unremitting work, and found it desperately hard to concentrate. However, she succeeded more or less, and thought that Armie would be pleased with what she had done when they met at three the following day.

She made another try to get Garrie next morning, but without success, and had no time to go and look for him anywhere.

She spent a breathless day, all along until three o’clock, when her appointment with Armitage must be kept.

Continually she wavered between the determination not to let him take her for a drive that evening and the desire to go, in order perhaps to pick up something from him—something that might give a lead or supply the smallest clue.

Finally she made up her mind that, always supposing that he renewed his invitation in a sufficiently pressing form, she would go, and that she would tell him of the finding of the pochette. In view of his friendship with Irma, he simply could not pretend impatient indifference in face of such a piece of news.

Meanwhile, Colonel Borrow succeeded during the morning in having a long talk with Professor Dalton—a talk which, while it did not much enlighten him, yet left him assured that Armitage was concealing something. If that were so a frontal attack was not likely to be of much use. If the young man chose not to speak he could not be forced to do so ; and if he really knew nothing, if the girl who was by most people confidently believed to be his fiancée had simply vanished and left him in the lurch, to question him might be to torture him unnecessarily.

To search the mill on Welwych Moor without saying anything to anyone might bring to light some clue which Hayes and he would know how to interpret. He had, so far, no direct evidence that Irma had been there that night, so a formal search-warrant could not be issued ; but Professor Dalton had strong suspicions, and as the case was in his own hands the Chief Constable meant to strain a point.



As he ate his lunch he found himself thinking about Dilys Pendered.

Like Armitage and Garrie Ord, the moment his attention was directed to this girl he perceived her unusual quality and her curious attractiveness. The notes of her voice lingered in his mind ; he recalled many times the look in her face as she identified the pochette, and the fine way in which she had fought back all display of emotion. He was studying Irma's photograph as he ate, and he admitted that her face was the type for which young men would fall. He thought it strange. In his opinion the face of Dilys was by far the more subtly fascinating.

He had lunched late, and it was nearly three o'clock when one of his plain-clothes men brought him the report that Armitage had driven in his car to the large new organic chemistry lab. in the park, and would be giving a lesson until four.

He sprang to his feet at once, and went straight out to his fast car, awaiting him and ready to start.

He gave orders to White to go back on his motorcycle to the College and to watch narrowly for the Professor's reappearance. The moment he left the building he was to be followed unobtrusively, and should he show any signs of driving up to Welwych Moor, White was to shoot ahead on his racer, and could reach the mill in time to prevent a surprise.

In half an hour he himself, with Hayes and a couple of men, had arrived at Armitage's observatory, armed with Dalton's key.

HAVING carefully parked their car out of sight in the spinney across the road, the marauders waited until a solitary cart which was leisurely traversing the lonely moor road had disappeared, and then with all speed mounted the exterior stair and entered the dim old mill, with its mingled odour of tobacco, tar, paraffin and dry wood.

The Colonel ordered the immediate throwing back of the shutters from every window the whole way round, and the big, circular room emerged into full daylight. He was quite determined to make a really thorough search, such as Hayes well knew how to carry out, and they had not more than two hours at the latest before dusk fell—none too long a time and none too strong a light.

He cast round a preliminary glance with eyes that missed little. The place was quite tidy, with that blank negative kind of male tidiness which is so different from the "swept and garnished" effect of a room which had been "done" by a woman. Apparently no one had been there for the last two or three days, for a fine film of dust overlay everything.

He had bethought him that morning that an example of the missing girl's finger-prints might be useful, and had dispatched his expert, a man called Bent, to Houston Square to secure one. Guided by Etheldreda Jenkins, Bent had obtained an excellent set from a metal cigarette-box which only Miss Varick used and which was kept in a drawer beside her bed.



Etheldreda explained that the sitting-room box might very likely bear the marks of other people's fingers ; but she felt fairly sure that those upon the one produced were Miss Varick's own. She (Etheldreda) never dusted either box, because they were kept the one in a drawer, the other in a cupboard.

There were not many finger-marks at the mill. All chairs, cupboard doors, etc., seemed to have been carefully wiped. They found some on the clean crockery of the dresser shelves, and these were presumably those of Armitage. There were also some upon a half-empty whisky bottle, more mixed up, but distinguishable.

The camp-bed behind the screens was most carefully unmade and remade by the searchers, without yielding any sort of clue. As well as the bed there was a small table with an enamelled basin, washed clean, and a large enamelled jug full of water ; also a soap-dish with a half-finished cake of soap. These things had all been cleansed since the last time of use.

Here was also the improvised drain in the wall—a semi-basin-shaped piece of zinc—in fact, an actual basin cut in two with the bottom scooped away and a pipe connection, amateurish but effective, which passed through the wooden wall. Colonel Borrow looked outside and saw that the pipe was carried down to about a foot from the ground, and discharged into a hollow lined with concrete and having a sloping exit which led the water away downhill to a ditch.

He sent one of the men down to examine the concrete for traces of anything which might have been

lately washed down, a search which, it may be mentioned, resulted only in a couple of small fragments of tomato skin.

Suddenly Hayes, who was prowling round examining everything which was on a level with his own eyes, uttered a curious little sound, habitual with him when discovering something—a kind of cough, well-known to his subordinates, resembling the muffled bark of a watchdog who thinks he hears a footstep.

“Here, sir, some finger-marks on the edge of this lacquer screen ! Look to me too small to be a man’s ! Come on, Bent ! ”

Swiftly the insufflator got to work and the photos were taken by flashlight. Until they were printed there could be no identification ; but it really did look as if they belonged to the same hand which had made the impressions upon the cigarette-box at Houston Square.

This was a bit of evidence which struck the Colonel as highly significant. Doubtless ladies came up to the mill from time to time to use the Professor’s telescope ; but the telescope was upstairs, and it might be supposed that visitors would not linger in that part of the room, right against the screens, which acted as Armitage’s bedroom wall. The woman whose hand left those marks must be on intimate terms with the man who owned the place.

He stood brooding, with folded arms, staring at the boards. At the moment the westering sun, which had been veiled in cloud all day, came out with brilliance and shot a ray of vivid light right across the



room, as though to call attention to something overlooked, and revealing marks of scouring upon a part of the floor, as if it had been lately washed, but not all over. In the illumination was also suddenly made manifest a rusty-looking patch upon the dark maroon colour of a large rug of the cheap, rough oriental kind, which lay nearer the entrance, and farther from the table.

"Look there, Hayes," said the Chief Constable quickly, pointing to the discoloration. They all looked.

"Something been spilt there," observed Hayes slowly.

"Take up all the rugs," was the sharp command. The large maroon one with the rusty patch stuck to the floor on being raised; and when it had been detached there was a stain—a thick, dark stain—upon the boards beneath.

Hayes went down on his knees and carefully felt over both rug and floor. With a knife he proceeded to scrape some of the dried fragments from the wood, laying them on a bit of white paper.

"Not much doubt but what that's blood, sir. It's almost sticky still," he observed, rubbing a flake between his finger and thumb.

They proceeded to examine the fabric of the rug, where the stuff had soaked through. Hayes picked off some particles and put them in a little water. He also carefully smelt the soiled place.

"Yes," he remarked at last, "they'll have to analyse it; but I'll stake a week's screw that it's

blood—and blood spilt lately too. It's scarcely hard yet."

"Collect all you can," enjoined his chief urgently. "This gives us something to go upon—something definite. Blood has been shed here, and all that fell upon the bare floor has been carefully washed off; but this patch apparently escaped the attention of the person who did the cleaning."

"Any clothing here anywhere, sir? In any drawer, or hanging on the wall?"

There was nothing of the kind—no clothing except a thick set of flannel pyjamas which were folded in the bed, and which yielded nothing, even under a magnifying glass.

"This place has got to be turned inside out. It's full of dark nooks and places where a body might be concealed."

"There's a whole floor under here, sir, pitch dark and crowded with lumber."

"Yes; and open rafters, thicker than a man's body, stretching away into darkness above there."

"Not likely," observed Hayes. "that they'd plant a body up there where the telescope is—couldn't remain undiscovered——"

"Unless it was smothered in quicklime," put in one of his mates.

"Much more likely to bury something in the spinney over there," said another. Or—he has a car, hasn't he?"

The Colonel started. The story told him by Dalton of Armitage having made his appearance, in his car,



coming apparently from the road that led to the Estuary, leapt to mind, linked with the finding of the brocade pochette in the water.

There was something here which must certainly be looked into. It might not be murder, but the girl's disappearance made even that seem possible. Armitage might have nothing to do with it, as he declared ; but *something* had happened that night in the mill, and the Chief Constable thought his best course would be to leave the place now and take out a formal search-warrant for next morning "on information received." He also resolved to have the mill watched all night.

The sound of a motor-cycle rapidly approaching made Hayes dart to the window. "It's White, sir ! Had I better replace this rug ? "

"Replace everything, exactly as you found it. We must leave no traces of this visit," replied his chief.

"He doesn't seem to be in much of a hurry," remarked Bent, who was watching the movements of the messenger. "Let's hear what he's got to say—eh ? "

White went first to hide his machine, then came to the foot of the stair, and the Colonel went down to him.

"I thought you'd wish to know, sir, that a minute or two before four o'clock Professor Armitage came out of the College building with a young lady. It was Miss Pendered, who was with Miss Hawke yesterday—same young lady that identified the wallet we found. She went off in the car with Professor Armitage—his own car—and I heard him say to a

feller who was talking to them—a College student, I mean, sir—that they were running out to Carsdon for a cup of tea, as Miss Pendered was tired and needed a rest before starting on her evening's work. So the Professor won't be coming up here this evening, sir—certainly not before dark."

This news had upon Colonel Borrow the effect of something so unexpected as to be almost startling.

He had not supposed that Miss Pendered was on intimate terms with Armitage, though why this should not be so he could hardly have said.

He tried to think back over the conversation in Miss Hawke's room the previous day. What had Miss Pendered said? She had intimated that Miss Hawke was quite mistaken as to the terms on which Armitage and Irma Varick stood. She had said they were engaged to be married, and that Irma had on the very afternoon of her disappearance told her that she had no intention of carrying out this engagement.

Seeing that she knew that much, she probably knew a great deal more. Her going driving with Armitage suggested either that she and he had secret knowledge in common, or that she intended to tell him of the finding of the pochette, a thing which the Colonel had purposely kept out of the papers, hoping himself to spring the news upon the suspect.

Their destination—Carsdon—was capable of another solution. Carsdon lies at the end of the cliffs, a little below the place whereat the tributary on which Gorchester stands flows out into the estuary. There is a place near it called the Split Sucker—a gash in the



cliff wherein the incoming and outgoing tides eddy and swirl, and where things dropped from boats, or thrown into the water, are apt to become entangled. Could they have gone there with the intention of searching? Was Armitage as ignorant as other people concerning the girl's fate? . . . The supposition was conceivable.

It was useless for the Chief Constable to drive to Carsdon in pursuit, because it would be dark quite shortly, and he would be too late to intercept them.

Queer. He had certainly not received the impression during his short interview with Dilys that she was on intimate terms with Armitage. A girl, he would have said, of limpid sincerity and honour. . . . Armitage too. Evidently one of the best-liked, most highly-esteemed, of the College staff. . . . The whole thing seemed nightmarish. He thought he had better tackle Armitage himself. But he wished that he had been able to do so before Dilys had broken to him the carefully suppressed news of the finding of the pochette.

## CHAPTER XVII

## *DILYS TRIES AND FAILS*

**D**ILYS had tried more than once that day—it was Friday—to get in touch with Garrie, but in vain.

She felt an urgent need to consult him respecting

the wisdom or otherwise of going for a drive with Armitage. Being unable to reach him, she had to decide for herself, and the thought of the little vanity-case rescued from the waves drove her on. She determined to go, in the spirit of one leading a forlorn hope. She meant if she could to break up Philip's false calm, to sting him out of his reticence, to hurl at him the tidings of what had been found in the water.

How she was to carry out this intention she had no idea. The man was evidently pleased—unaccountably so, she thought—at the fact of her consenting to go with him.

As soon as they were off he began to talk, eagerly and easily, as to a congenial companion ; and he was a charming conversationalist. His mind appeared to be full of a recent article upon a recent poet—an article in the "Spectator"—and this launched them upon a topic equally fascinating to both. Dilys said to herself that he was talking to conceal thought, but none the less he carried her away with him. Each minute they were discovering mutual likes and dislikes, mutual cults and admirations. Nothing is more subtly delightful than such a discovery, but in their case it was enhanced by the element of surprise on both sides.

Dilys was a member of the science side of the University. He had not known that her tastes were literary. He was probing a part of her character of which he had hitherto been quite unaware.

Presently she brought out a bit of criticism of the



author they were discussing. It was so trenchant and so discerning, yet at the same time delivered so simply and naturally, that he burst out uncontrollably :

“ Where have you been hiding all this time, O Daniel come to judgment? How long have you lain concealed in this University? ”

Dilys laughed. “ Why, it will be two years this Christmas since I came ! In fact, it has become a kind of second nature to me to be a student ! I feel as if I had always been here.”

“ And I,” he murmured in tones of wonder, as if he spoke his thought aloud, “ have only just discovered you.”

“ Well, that’s a bit of a facer for me ”—ironically. “ Because, you know, you have played quite a part in my evolution. But for you I don’t suppose I could have got the Wavertree. I always humbly supposed you to be more or less interested in my work, and now I realize that all the time you never even knew I was there. Awfully flattering for me.”

“ Oh, you know very well what I mean,” he replied quite pettishly. “ Of course I have always known how quickly you could *take in*—an excellent quality in a pupil—but I had no notion of the way in which you can *give out*. Why ”—in a kind of outburst—“ you’re a woman with an original mind—a woman of culture ! ”

“ Is that so rare ? ” Her tone was dry.

“ Very rare,”—with emphasis—“ and growing rarer. Miss Hawke declares that every fresh batch of students

that come up has less mind than the previous one ! I find it so with the men too. They can acquire facts, they can cram themselves with knowledge, but they cannot think. The power of thought is being lost in the march of science. Rather a nasty reflection that—eh ? ”

“ Well ”—she gave the idea her full consideration—“ I own that I shouldn’t myself say that the girls in the Kittery are thinkers. Most of them seem to be out for a kind of ideal of pleasure-snatching, as little work as will enable them to scrape through, and as much fun as is available for their money.”

“ Quite. Why is it ? Where are we getting to, do you suppose ? ”

“ I think we are just preparing to swing back. I have a silly idea that in this world there is no such thing as progress ; what we call progress is only reaction. The centuries are just the swing of a giant pendulum—this way, that way—this way, that way ! Just to show you what I mean : my grandmother is a very able woman, and she has told me that in her youth the education of women was still a novelty. It was something to be treasured and made the most of, because they had only got it through much tribulation ; and so they worked like anything. Boys, who had always had it offered them with both hands, had grown contemptuous of what was always there for the picking up. Now we are in the third generation, and reaction has set in. To the girls of to-day learning is a commonplace—the usual thing—and so we waste our chances as boys do.”



"Something in that," he assented, but she saw that he was interested.

"All this century, as I see it," she went on, "has been a swinging back from an extraordinarily high standard which had grown stereotyped, and therefore ceased to attract. We therefore broke out into a cult of savagery. Our ideals were smashed to bits, our art relapsed into the art of cave-men, our literature was either vicious or grotesque. Where is the next reversal of the pendulum going to land us, I wonder?"

Philip was silent, but not because he was not attending. He was contemplating the thought of Dil and what she had said about reaction. During these past months, since Irma rose upon his horizon, it had been a case of *la belle dame sans merci* with him. He was now feeling like Tannhäuser in the cool dawn of the mountain-side, after the heat and glare and delirium of the temple of Venus. Was it just reaction? Baulked passion, like that which once threw Romeo from the scorn of the dark Rosaleen back upon the baby charms of Juliet?

Fiercely he rejected that notion. This wonderful girl at his side was no baby. She was strong. He had felt her strength. She was also attractive to an extent which astonished him profoundly.

He began to wonder whether he could make her like and trust him; for somewhere in the profundities of his subconscious mind he was aware that she was doubtful of him. When he talked of literature she was interested; when he tried to talk of her, she "was not having any," as he ruefully told himself.

He laid himself out to be what he thought would be most acceptable to her. With increasing difficulty he avoided the personal note, and kept her not only amused but provided with material for thought and debate, until they reached Carsdon and had driven up to a charming little hotel, with a garden, near the cliff verge.

Dilys had not often been to Carsdon. Her expeditions were made mostly with Garrie, in the *Pêche*, and Carsdon was too sophisticated for them. They preferred tea on the cliffs or the heather to tea in a hotel garden. On this occasion Armitage had driven along an inland road, in order to prolong a *tête-à-tête* which he had found absorbing. It was a surprise to the girl to step out suddenly upon the very edge of the land and to find herself gazing over the sunset-gilded flood of the estuary.

The feeling which had been pushed into the background while they talked and drove swept over her so abruptly that it was all she could do to fight it back. How *could* Philip stand there so unmoved—apparently without thinking of the associations of the place at all?

“Rather late in the season to be picnicking out of doors at tea-time,” he remarked as he led the way along the garden, full of Michaelmas daisies and dahlias as yet untouched by frost. There were small tables under the west-fronting verandah, and lamps hung over them. “You like being outside?” he asked solicitously. “Sun’s a bit in our eyes, but it will be down in a quarter of an hour, and then it



may be a bit chilly. Would you rather be indoors?" he went on as she did not reply. "I always think it's so attractive out here, looking over the sea——"

He broke off, noting suddenly how deeply she was moved. She put out her hand to grip the back of a chair and stood there her face illumined by the last brilliant sun-gleam—the same fierce ray which, had he known it, was at that moment illuminating the rusty patch on his rug up at the mill.

The radiance revealed her unnatural pallor, and touched the soft locks of her hair with golden light. Framed in the background of her simple hat, it gave the effect of an aureole. The man who saw it fairly caught his breath at the wonder of the sight—that angelic aspect which he had already detected in her.

As he stood there devouring her with his eyes, she turned her gaze upon him; and once again he experienced the strange power of that piercing look to make him feel guilty and abashed.

"Oh," she murmured, her voice low, scarcely above a whisper, yet to him terribly audible, "I can hardly believe it! You can talk like this—bring me to this place—look out coolly on those dreadful depths . . . and yet you loved her! . . . Oh, you *must* have loved her . . . so how can you, how *can* you pretend that you don't care?"

He was so astonished that he stood a while, mute before her. They were quite alone on the verandah. There were no other visitors and the waiter had gone to carry out Philip's order for tea.

"Dilys, what are you saying?" he stammered.

She left him no time for more, sweeping on in a voice broken by hardly-restrained tears,

"You must care! You *must*! If you don't you're a—well, something quite unlike what I have always thought you! She was so beautiful and so gay, so bubbling over with life. . . . How can you bear to think of her, perhaps floating, dead and horrible on that pitiless, vast tide——"

She broke off because she could no longer control her voice. In her trouble, fearing lest her face might be seen by the waiter, she walked away to the railing that guarded the edge, holding her handkerchief to her mouth and seeming to be gazing with interest at the fiery pageant of the sinking sun.

He had had time to collect himself and he followed her resolutely. "Will you please tell me what you mean?" he asked coldly.

"No," she replied, "because you know quite well what I mean, and of whom I am speaking." Indignation at his hypocrisy overcame her weeping and enabled her to continue more or less firmly. "But perhaps you don't know everything—of course you haven't heard, because Colonel Borrow is keeping it quiet——"

"Colonel Borrow?" sharply and loudly.

"Yes. But he showed it to me yesterday. . . . Her little—her little case she kept her hankie in—the one I gave her last Christmas—floating out there, wet and limp . . . floating——"

She had to abandon any attempt to say more. She just stood fighting her sobs. He said nothing for



a long time, but something told her that he was stricken.

At last she heard him speaking, low but steadily. He was standing close behind her. "Dilys, you must listen to me, please."

"I *want* to listen—to hear what you have to say. I want you to tell me—where is she? Only do please not go on pretending you don't know and don't care."

"But—but truly, Dilys, I don't know; and—I don't think that I do care—much," he replied, incredibly. "Tell me, please—let me try to grasp what is in your mind about me. Am I to understand that you think I have made away with Irma Varick? Answer. Does what you know of me incline you to suppose such a thing likely?"

Something in his cold voice warned her that he was very angry, but she had brought him to bay and she meant to go on. "Last week I should have said 'Certainly not' in answer to that question," she replied; "but now it is different. I know now that you are not what I thought you, so I feel anything is possible."

"Well!" he ejaculated in tones of deep offence. "May I ask what has caused you to change your opinion of me so radically? Was it perhaps my recent offer to help you with your work?"

"You know it was not. And I—I know that I am very nearly helpless without your help, and that I am endangering—oh, yes, more than that—I am forfeiting my chances in daring to talk to you like this. But I must speak for her sake——"

"Then I wish to goodness you would. Speak out! More than ever am I anxious to know what I have done that should make you apparently suppose that I flung Irma Varick into the water."

She did not immediately reply, and he said impatiently, "Come! You have gone too far to draw back now!"

He was standing behind her, for he found it easier that way to be angry with her; but as he challenged her she turned and lifted to him once again the gaze that made him flinch. "You have not spoken the truth," said she slowly and with sorrowful emphasis—more completely the "avenging angel" than ever. "Irma was with you on the evening of her disappearance, and you denied it. Why did you deny it?"

He was undeniably startled. "Who says she was with me?" he demanded resentfully, but falteringly, no longer as one unjustly attacked.

"Garrie says so, and Garrie always speaks the truth——"

"Garrie! You mean young Ord?"

"Yes. He is a sort of cousin of mine, you know. He told me about it some time before it was known that Irma had disappeared."

"But how could he know?"

"Because he saw you both go into the mill."

Armitage took a quick turn along the verandah and back. The waiter appeared, carrying the tray, and he spoke to him hastily. "Carry it indoors, please; it is growing a little chilly outside here."

"Very good, sir. I think you're wise; you'll be



far more comfortable indoors than what you would be here. Season's over—finished, as you might say, sir," remarked the man, passing into the dining-room through the French windows.

"You are mistaken," said Philip, coming back to where the girl stood. "Ord could not have seen us."

"I tell you he did see you. He went up to Welwych to take an observation for Professor Dalton. He did not expect that you would be at the mill, because you had told him you had an engagement elsewhere. He took Dalton's key with him. Just as he had parked his car he saw you and Irma drive up. He—well, he told me he naturally did not want to 'barge in,' in view of what everyone thought and said about your being engaged to Irma——"

"Really, Miss Pendered"—he was too preoccupied to note that after having twice called her Dilys he had returned to the more formal way of address—"you surprise me very much. Do you say that *everyone*—comprehensive term—supposed that Irma Varick and I were engaged?"

"Oh, you must have known they did! You were always together. The girl students were making bets as to when it would be announced."

Evidently this news was a bit staggering. "The fierce light that beats upon a professorship," he murmured. "I never heard anything of it; and certainly I never saw Garrie that night until much later."

"No. He drove off and went joy-riding for an hour, so as not to interrupt. Then——"

“ Yes, go on ? ”

“ Then he returned. There seemed nobody about, but he ran upstairs and went into the mill to make sure that you were not still there, before parking his car. He lit the lamp and saw you had been there—the clock was going, and so on ; and then, you see——”

“ Well, go on, can’t you ? ”

“ Then he caught his foot, quite accidentally, in the rug, and fell into the—*the blood*——”

He repeated the two words after her, staring like one frozen with horror. After a silence he whispered, “ Where was—the blood ? ”

“ It was on a rug—a dark rug. It did not show.”

He muttered, “ I never knew it was there. Well then, what ? ”

“ Then he went outside and met you. He said you were looking perfectly ghastly. You told him you had only just come. Of course he knew that to be untrue, but it was no business of his. He left you up there, at the mill ; you said you were very tired, that your car had been in an accident, and that you were going to bed at once, when you had had a bit of supper. . . . But when Professor Dalton and his friend came up, much later, they met you driving back to the mill, in the car which you had told Garrie was out of action. And yesterday they found—the little case—in the water——”

“ Well,” said Armitage heavily, “ I think we must admit that you had grounds for suspicion of me. Nevertheless, I tell you plainly your conclusions are utterly wrong. I also tell you, equally plainly, that



I am not going to say one word more to you on the subject in question. Not a word. You must think what you like—believe what you like. Only on one point let us be quite clear. I had no hand in Miss Varick's disappearance, and I do not know where she is. If you will take my word, there it is. Can you accept it? Are you able to see that I am speaking the truth?"

She averted her head without speech, and in a sudden change of mood he laid his hands gently on her arms, turning her face to him. "Dilys," he said in a tone that sent a thrill through her, "it is most important to me that you should believe me. Not that I fear consequences, but because I must have your trust. For pity's sake try to realize of what you accuse me. You don't really, sincerely, take me for a villain, do you? If you can look me in the eyes and say that you know me to be telling you the truth then we can continue our friendship and my lessons; but if not . . . I fear I could not face the pain of being in daily communication with you, while you rebuke me with those accusing eyes."

She answered slowly, "Why am I to believe you although you decline to explain? All that I know of you, I know as it were professionally. We have never been friends. Yet you are demanding an extraordinary proof of friendship, are you not?"

"I am," he replied shortly; "but there it is. Either you can trust me or—you can't. Which is it?"

"You don't trust me, so why——"

"But I do trust you," he broke in roughly.

"No ; for you will not console me by telling me anything that might help me to find my friend."

"One day I may. . . . See here, I can make this promise. As soon as I am able I will tell you all I know. Will that do ?"

To this she made no reply at all.

He frowned. "I think," he said abruptly, "that we must pull ourselves together and go indoors and eat that tea which is awaiting us. If we don't—if, after this interview in the garden, you walk off and leave me to eat alone, there will be another black mark against my name when all this gets into the papers. Everything I do and say will then become 'news,' as the saying is, and this old waiter will remember that I brought another attractive young lady here, bullied her, and drove her away. Better not risk that, because they might drag in your name too."

"How can I accept your hospitality after telling you off so—so drastically ?"

"If I can bear to sit with you after hearing the indictment you must bear to sit with me after making it," he retorted at once ; and after a slight hesitation she saw that there was really nothing else to be done.

"I note that you haven't given me any answer about trusting me," he remarked as they sat down. "Think it over, please. I am not going to bully you any more now, because the sun has set, it is growing dark and cold, and I don't want you to weep into my tea as you pour it out."



Dilys gave a parting glance at the leaden water so lately glittering and entrancing. In the dusk the top of the hedge of exquisite petunia-mauve Michaelmas daisies caught the last peep of day, and, melting away into deep purple shadow below reminded her of a violet pall curved over a coffin-lid.

Slowly she walked to the window and entered the world of artificial light, talk and cigarette-smoke.

## CHAPTER XVIII      GARRIE CROSS-EXAMINED

GARRIE and his tutor had been feverishly hard at work all that day in the labs. When at last he was free, the young man suddenly decided to get out the *Pêche* and go for a run in her to blow away the cobwebs.

He rang up Dil on the chance of her being able to come too, but was told she was still out. This was vexatious, for he had specially wished to take her with him out to Rose Crag. However, he knew that she was just embarking upon a great deal of extra work, including special lessons, so he was not surprised, though disappointed that he must go alone.

It was rather a futile journey, in any case, he told himself as he pushed off. He had left it too late, if he wished to search for an answer to the question which recurred to his mind continually—namely,

whether Armitage had or had not driven to the Crag, late on the night of Irma's disappearance.

He hardly knew what, if anything, he expected to find ; for even had no rain fallen the short, harsh grass, bent-bestrewn, which clothed the way up to the summit could carry no trustworthy impressions of car-tyres ; and, even if it did, the two days of driving storm at the beginning of the week would have obliterated everything. In short, it was a foolish quest, but nevertheless he was set upon having a look round.

He found the ground dry enough when he arrived on the scene. A keen wind had been blowing all day, though it had died down as sunset drew on. At this time of year the summer stream of motorists had practically ceased ; but there had been many cars up there during the previous week-end, owing to the exceptionally high tide—crowds of townsfolk eager to see the sea actually washing deep at the foot of the Crag.

On this Friday afternoon, in the rapidly passing beauty of a dazzling sunset, he had the place entirely to himself.

He drove the *Pêche* into the field, and ascended on foot to the summit. He gave special attention to the place he had noted the previous week, whereat the barbed wire fencing had sagged backward for a space of several feet owing to the action of a miniature landslide, which had loosened the earth behind it. Just at that spot there were several footmarks, or, as might be more justly said, evidence of trampling :



nothing distinguishable. Garrie prowled all round, up and down, peering over the edge as dangerously as he dared. The water was now many feet away from the cliff edge, leaving clear space all along on which to walk. It looked unusually smooth and clean down there, after its recent submersion. He thought it might have been wiser on his part to have gone down to the ferry and walked along the coast, instead of making the ascent. However, it was now too late for that, for he knew the dark would be soon upon him.

He wandered back to the field gate and out into the lane in a search, which seemed hopeless from the first, for identifiable tyre-marks. Everything had been washed into a confused mess, and then hardened into ruts by the drying wind. He was just about to give it up when, at a bend in the road, where it swept round a jutting group of windswept hazel-bushes and whins, he caught sight of something that stopped him dead.

A car had swerved, in turning the corner, right out to the grassy fringe of the roadway. The bank slightly overhung the reddish sand at that point, and there were trees above, so that the track of what had passed there had been sheltered from the subsequent rain and had been left, clear and sharp-cut, for a length of several feet.

What made Garrie's heart thump a bit was that the imprint was that of an Afflatus tyre, and Armitage's car, as he well knew, had been lately refitted with these.

Considered as a clue, it was an excellent impression,

clean-edged, except for one or two places in which the indentation of the passing wheel had carried away a bit of nipped-out soil.

This soil was unlike anything else around Trechester—Garrie was geologist enough to know would well. If the tyres of Philip's car should be found the have retained even one small piece of marl of that colour it would show pretty conclusively that he had driven past that place.

Garrie frowned. It seemed beastly for him to be there spying—to be thinking such treacherous thoughts. Yet, try as he would, he could not escape the conclusion that Philip had driven late that night to the verge of the cliff—for what conceivable purpose but to destroy some bit of evidence? He knew that he himself had really come hither this evening in order to reassure himself—to feel convinced that there was “nothing in it”; and here was what looked like confirmation of his doubts in a contrary direction.

Should he obliterate that bit of evidence, or leave it?

It was growing dark, with the swiftness of the equinox. The brilliant flash of sunset which had lit up everything when he arrived had ebbed away, and dusk was falling. After some thought he climbed to the opposite hedgerow, where he moved about collecting dry, wispy hazel-bush leaves from the ground. These he carried back carefully and strewed lightly and thoroughly over the wheel-mark. It would only be by accident that any driver would swerve far enough to the edge to obliterate it. He could not quite tell



Why he thought the evidence should be preserved, that he did, although he did not wish it to be obvious to the passer-by. When the leaves were arranged they looked merely like a chance collection blown over by the wind ; yet they could easily be removed, so that he should feel that he ought to show someone what lay beneath.

With furrowed brow he went to where his car stood, started her up, turned her and drove back slowly and carefully past the place.

On his homeward way he was thinking, thinking all the time. It seemed as if perhaps they might all have been mistaken about Armie—about his character. He remembered hearing Aunt Ag say that he was a man you never seemed to succeed in knowing better. He was so cordial, his manner was always so friendly and he himself was so delightfully unassuming that you did not realize until afterward that you had not penetrated one inch below the surface during the talk which had seemed so intimate.

Was he perhaps in reality a totally different person from the popular young professor who was considered such an acquisition to the College ?

Garrie was mopish and preoccupied at dinner that night, and when it was over he rang up Majendie Terrace and excused himself from coming home to spend the evening with Aunt Ag, wending his way instead to his own particular work-place, and preparing for an evening of toil over the matters which, although not in his direct line of work, were then engaging his attention. He had not worked long

before he felt that a telescopic observation would be of the greatest help to him. Yet he had a most definite repugnance to the idea of going up to Welwych to take it. He thought this over. If he were to make any progress with his new calculations he would simply *have* to go there, and pretty often. It was the only telescope to which he could conceivably have access.

After a slight hesitation he rang up Professor Dalton to explain the situation, and inquire whether he knew if Armitage was up at the mill, or intended going there that evening.

Bridget came to the telephone and said that her father had just come back from dining in hall. Having carried Garrie's message, she brought back the news that he had left Armitage in the common room, deep in a crossword puzzle ! If Garrie liked to call round, he could have the observatory key.

Garrie accordingly retrieved his car from the College yard and drove round. Bridget opened the door, with the message that her father would like a word with him, so he alighted and went into the tobacco-scented, untidy den wherein the Professor was taking his ease.

"Just sit down a minute, Ord," said Dalton, in serious tones, unlike his usual jolly manner. "If you are going up to Welwych I think it only fair to let you know that you may find one of the police up there in charge."

Garrie felt suddenly cold with apprehension. "The police ?" he stammered.



"M'yes. As you yourself were up there on the night of—er—Miss Varick's disappearance, there are one or two questions I should like to put to you."

"To *me*, sir?"

"I'm not accusing you of making away with the lady, my boy; but, on the other hand, I should like to be quite clear that you are not accessory, either before or after the fact."

"I don't understand," said Garrie after a pause. "Is—is anything wrong?"

"That is the thing we want to know. And it is for that reason that I wish to inquire of you. Did you remark anything unusual in Armitage's manner or appearance that night?"

Garrie hesitated. "Am I obliged to reply, sir?" he said at length.

"I think it's your duty."

"Are you *sure* it's my duty?"

"Well, of course, I can't say that I am legally empowered to examine you——"

"Then I think, sir, please, I would rather say nothing at all."

Dalton eyed him narrowly. "I suppose you are aware that in saying what you have just said you are in a way answering my question?"

"You may draw certain inferences from my refusal," said Garrie apologetically, "but you cannot found any argument upon it. You can only conjecture."

Dalton thought again. "You like Armitage?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"But you also were—I should say you are—a friend of Miss Varick?"

"Not a great friend, by any means. But I know her personally. She is a friend of my cousin, Miss Pendered."

"Hey! I was forgetting Miss Pendered was related to you! Wheels within wheels! . . . Well, I don't know whether Colonel Borrow would say I am doing right, but——"

"Did you say *Colonel Borrow*, sir? The Chief Constable?"

"I did. He will probably be coming to interview you soon, and I think you had better give him frank replies when he does come. What I was about to tell you is that something was found yesterday morning and brought to Colonel Borrow—a small article which, when it was shown to Miss Pendered, she at once identified as the property of Miss Varick."

"Found? Where was it found?"

"Remember, Ord, if I tell you this, it is in confidence. The authorities are doing their utmost not to make this matter public. They found it floating in the waters of the Estuary."

Garrie dropped his head in his hands and groaned, "Oh, good Lord!"

"I fear," went on Dalton, "that the whole thing will have to be made public now, and that it might have been better to do so sooner. In that case your evidence will have to be given on oath, before a coroner's jury perhaps."



"But they haven't found—surely you don't mean to say that they have found the—the body?"

"No. But they are searching for it."

"You can't," murmured Garrie vaguely, as if snatching at some hold on realities, "you can't have an inquest without a body."

"Quite. One has no wish to jump to conclusions; but I can't help remembering that I saw Armitage come driving along as if he had been out to the Craggs, that night; and he had in his hand something that seems to have belonged to Miss Varick. He now swears that this was not so. He says that what he was holding was a fox's brush. He showed me one, fastened to the wall of the mill. But I'm an old family man and I know something about the things girls put round their necks. It was a neck-fur he was carrying, or a boa, or a stole, or whatever it's the fashion to call it. I feel fairly sure of that. Borrow had some of his men hunting about round the mill to-day, so Miss Hawke tells me. If they have found anything, the matter can't be concealed any longer—it will have to be made public; and, in short, don't you think you had better tell what you know?"

Garrie was very pale. He knew little about these matters, and nothing at all about the value of circumstantial evidence, but it seemed to him that he could not mention the blood on the mill floor without putting a rope round the neck of a man whom he sincerely liked. He looked as he felt, terribly nervous and embarrassed. "You see, I thought it was an elopement," he muttered, "and it has all along been

obvious that Armitage has not eloped, so why make mischief? ”

“ Yes. Well, it now begins to look as though it were something less pleasant than an elopement ; so your ideas about concealing what you know may have to be changed—eh? ”

Garrie was spared the effort of replying, for at the moment Bridget put in her head at the door.

“ Father, the Chief Constable is here, with the Superintendent, and they want to know if they may see you.”

Garrie sprang to his feet, but Dalton restrained him with a quick word. “ Stay where you are, Ord. This is a very good thing,” he said sternly ; and Bridget stepped back, leaving the Colonel and Hayes to walk past her into the room.

Dalton rose with a dignity that somehow sat well and naturally upon his jocund and tubby appearance.

He made Garrie known to the visitors, who both looked at the young man with interest.

“ Have you been up at the mill, Colonel? ” he then asked eagerly.

“ Yes,” was the reply, “ and we are here to let you know what we found there, Professor. I am procuring a formal search-warrant for to-morrow morning on the strength of a rather sinister discovery that we have made. I don’t think it will be possible any longer to keep the matter private ; but at present it still is so, and you will know better than I whether I ought to divulge anything before Mr. Ord.”

Dalton eyed Garrie critically. “ Yes, Colonel, I



think I should tell him. He is a friend of Armitage, and very loyal. He has been loath to say anything that might make mischief. I think he is entitled to any knowledge that you have. It may assist him to make up his mind as to the course he ought to pursue."

"Well, perhaps so. He looks trustworthy," said Borrow, with a faint smile, which prepossessed Garrie in his favour. "Well, then, we found that blood had been recently spilt upon a small carpet or rug up there in the mill—spilt in considerable quantity; but owing probably to its being on a background which was like it in colour it had escaped the eyes of someone who had apparently wiped up blood from the bare floor around it."

Garrie could not resist his sigh of relief. The secret was out, and not through his means. The sigh did not escape the keen ear of the Chief Constable.

"You knew it was there?"

Garrie cleared his throat. "I blundered into it that night," he muttered, finding articulation difficult. "Of course I was surprised; but I thought Armitage might have hurt himself, or—well you know he's a terrific boxer—was a 'varsity heavyweight—I thought he might have tapped some fellow's claret."

"Did you mention it to him, may I ask?"

"No, I didn't. . . . You see, when I met him, outside in the road, he began to make up tales. He said various things that I knew were not true. . . . That made me think something was up. I mean, I guessed he had something to hide. However, I

couldn't do anything about it, could I? It was his business if he'd had a shindy and didn't want me to know. . . . The only thing was——”

“Yes?” prompted the Colonel as Garrie paused.

“Well”—reluctantly—“you see, I knew that Miss Varick had been there—up at the mill with him that evening——”

“You knew that? How did you know?”

“I saw them go in.”

“You saw Miss Varick go in to the mill in Armitage's company and have said nothing all this time—not even when you heard that she was missing?”

“You see, I was told that she had run away,” said Garrie bluntly. “They knew she had, because of that wire she sent telling her aunt she was not coming. Well, it was plain she hadn't gone off with Armitage, because there he was. So I decided it was a tangle, but I had better not get mixed up in it. I still think that he—Armitage—is all right. If anything happened to her some other fellow did it, and Armitage is holding his tongue to screen somebody.”

“That doesn't sound very likely, Garrie,” put in Dalton. “The mill is his property, and the girl was there with him. Was anyone else there, as far as you know?”

“No. Not as far as I know; but there might have been. It was a shiny night, and people do go up there to look at the stars——”

“By the owner's permission, I should suppose?” said Borrow.



Dalton answered, "Yes, that is so. Anyone going up there is invited either by Armitage or me."

"Did you invite anyone for that night?"

"No, because I was dining with the Principal."

"And if Armitage took Miss Varick there he would not be likely to ask others."

Hayes spoke for the first time. "I should be grateful," he observed, clearing his throat, "if Mr. Ord would favour us with a connected narrative. I should like to know exactly what he did that night, and the times, as near as he can provide them for us."

## CHAPTER XIX

## TYRE-MARKS ON THE CLIFF ROAD

GARRIE turned to the Colonel his clear, direct gaze, making a most favourable impression upon both the trained, experienced men who faced him.

"You can tell me, sir, whether it's my duty to make a statement," said he. "I am in your hands. I think you can understand how I'm placed. Armitage is not only my friend, he's also my boss. I wish to be loyal."

The Colonel nodded. "Whether you tell us anything here and now is a matter which lies entirely in your own discretion. You will certainly be called as a witness if there is—er—any kind of formal inquiry ;

## TYRE-MARKS ON

and you will have to be quite  
*demand* any information from.

I will put it to you that we  
helped by knowing what you can.

What you say might put us upon a new  
Indeed it will probably be helpful to A.  
he is innocent, as you believe, the truth c.  
him."

"I see that," replied Garrie, "and I think  
make a clean breast of things, only saying at the start  
that, though I'm quite sure something happened that  
night—probably something tragic—I'm also pretty  
sure that Armitage isn't in any sense guilty. And one  
other thing. I shall go to him to-morrow and tell  
him what I have told you."

Hayes made an objecting murmur, but his chief  
held up his hand.

"That's all right, Super," he said. "Professor  
Armitage went out driving this afternoon with Miss  
Pendered, the young lady who identified the little  
wallet. He has therefore most likely been already  
warned, and may as well know the rest also."

Garrie started slightly. "Miss Pendered was driving  
with Armitage this afternoon?" he asked sharply.

"Yes. I understand they went to tea at Cars-  
don."

Garrie digested this. "I should think you're  
right," he said meditatively. "She's pretty sure to  
have told him. Well, then, I expect he'll come round  
and see you, Colonel. Anyway, that being so, I may  
as well tell you what I know—all of it; and I'll begin



## ING TWO

to the mill last Friday night  
car as I can say."

He related all that passed afterwards,  
and confining himself rigidly to  
what he himself seen and heard. Both the Chief  
Inspector and Superintendent stopped him at times to ask  
questions, and Professor Dalton put in a word here  
and there to amplify or confirm.

When he had finished his account of that night, he  
proceeded to tell them of the investigation he had  
carried out at Rose Craggs that very afternoon.

"After the weather we had at the beginning of this  
week I didn't suppose there was much chance of  
finding anything that might be of value ; but I found  
what may be a real bit of evidence, when you consider  
it in relation to what the Professor here tells us about  
Armitage coming out of Welwych Drive."

He described the tyre-mark, to the breathless  
interest of Hayes.

"If Armitage's car has retained even one small bit  
of that soil," concluded Garrie, "it is a fair inference  
that the marks are his ; but of course there are other  
Afflatus tyres in Gorchester."

"They're not common," observed Hayes. "But  
I've heard lately of a good many that are trying 'em ;  
and, you see, nobody has had them long, so any  
impressions made by them would be sharp. However,  
I'm much obliged to you, sir, and I'll send down a  
couple of men to Rose Craggs early to-morrow morning.  
Perhaps you'd kindly indicate to me roughly, with a  
pencil, just whereabouts they lie ?"

Garrie did so, making a rough plan of the curve of the lane.

"I feel perfectly rotten about telling you all this," said he, "but I believe it's probably the only way of making him speak out. He'll have to explain things now that he simply *must* drop his pose of knowing nothing and caring nothing about the disappearance. It was awfully stupid of him ever to adopt it, because everyone knows that he and she were either engaged or as near as makes no difference. I feel certain that if he had made away with her, as some of these disgusting discoveries seem to suggest, that he would at least have pretended to be frantic with anxiety. Don't you think so, sir?" he asked the Colonel wistfully.

"I feel inclined to agree with that," remarked Professor Dalton, leaning forward to knock out the dottle of his pipe on the edge of the mantelpiece. "I wish I had known half of this when I undertook to tackle him. He was inclined to be very hoity-toity with me; but in face of all these facts he could hardly have kept up that attitude. If I'd known, for example, that Miss Varick was there that night—known for certain, that is—I don't see how he could have brazened it out."

"No," agreed Borrow thoughtfully. He stood up. "Well, Mr. Ord, we are much obliged for your clear statement. To-morrow we search Welwych Mill thoroughly, send down to Rose Crag for the tyre-prints, examine Armitage's car and order the long-shoremen to search the Split Sucker. A day's work, one way and another."



Hayes put away his pencil and note-book. "I don't like the look of it, sir," he remarked to his chief as they left the house. "He wouldn't let young Mr. Ord go near his car, pretended it was not in going order, and, as soon as he was left alone, drove off in it to Rose Crag—"

"We don't know that for certain—"

"Well, sir, we know that he went somewhere, for he was seen returning. The inference that he had something in the car that he felt he must get rid of is pretty strong."

"You're right, it is. I own I don't like the look of things for Armitage any better than you. But we mustn't ride off on inferences, remember that. We must ascertain facts."

"Quite," replied Hayes dryly, as one rebuking a platitude.

The meal to which Dilys and Armitage sat down together in the Carsdon Hotel was a weird experience for the girl. Dil was very unsophisticated, having been brought up in a remote and mountainous Welsh village, in whose vicarage she had been born, and which she had scarcely left until she arrived at Gorchester.

She had learned a bit at the Kittery, certainly, for many of the girls there were by no means unsophisticated, or if they began by being so had shed it after a couple of terms of consorting with the male students; although, like most girls of to-day, they were not nearly as experienced as they wished to be thought. But

most of the knowledge Dil had acquired was at second-hand.

Her natural disposition was that which the present day despises and sneers at ; that is to say, she was innately virginal. Her eyes never invited, her hands never caressed.

During the first weeks of her studentship her heart had gone out to Armitage. He had become for her the kind of romantic ideal which poor Charlotte Brontë made of her tutor Heger. But Dilys was, after all, the daughter of another age, and had neither the time nor the inclination to cultivate a sentimental romance for a man she hardly knew. Life for her was far better balanced, more filled with compensating ingredients than it was for the unhappy Charlotte. She had been able to watch without many pangs the increasing preoccupation of the Professor with the lovely Irma, and to realize with some surprise that Irma found him extremely fascinating.

As a looker-on she had seen for a long time that in the man's case the affair was immensely serious, while to Irma it was a game, absorbing for the moment, but liable to be quickly superseded if her fancy were caught elsewhere.

The curious thing was that Dilys had been wholly unable to trace the transfer of the beauty's affections. She had spoken the exact and literal truth when she assured Mrs. Gray that so far as she knew there was nobody in the University for whom Irma cared two straws, with the solitary exception of Armitage.

On every disengaged afternoon during the preceding



term Irma had gone off somewhere to meet him. With the object of being very careful, and not drawing upon themselves the attention of the whole university, the pair had been used to meet somewhere quite outside the city. Irma would take a 'bus out into the country, alight at a prearranged point, and be picked up when out of sight by Philip in his car.

To the best of Dil's knowledge, she did this on almost all her free afternoons, more especially after the departure of her uncle and aunt from Gorchester. Sometimes she would join in a picnic, sometimes she would play tennis and so on. But when she went anywhere with a single companion it was always Armitage.

Yet it now seemed certain that during most of this time she was carrying on an affair with someone else. It must be so. Most certainly she had not gone off alone. If she *had* gone off—— But had she?

Debating which question in her mind, Dilys was unconscious of the earnestness, the troubled pleading with which her gaze fixed itself upon the man who faced her.

His poise was perfect. He first saw to her wants, though he insisted that she pour the tea for both of them, and then, after a while, he began to talk. He talked of Carsdon and its ancient beginnings, of the traces of prehistoric man which lay inland, showing it as one of the very earliest haunts of social life in Britain. He well knew that such talk did not bore this girl as it would have bored ninety per cent of his pupils. It interested her profoundly. The thought

of Phoenician galleys, when Carthage still dominated the world, sailing up the river-mouth to trade with men who lived in villages raised on piles in the marshes, kindled in Dil's shadowy eyes the look that Philip already loved to call up therein.

"Yes," she said eagerly, "I remember how Irma told me——"

She stopped dead, and there was a tingling pause broken by Philip, who asked quietly, "I wonder what Irma told you?"

"It was about a month ago—quite at the beginning of term," she murmured. "You took her to see the lake-village, did you not?"

He looked blank. "I? Took Miss Varick to see the lake-village about a month ago? Certainly not. She and I were not by way of making expeditions of that kind together. If we went out, it was most often to a *matinée* in Bath, a theatre or a concert."

Dilys stared. "But you went to Glastonbury—oh, two or three times last term."

"I can assure you most definitely, that she and I have never visited Glastonbury together."

He could see that the girl facing him was more than astonished. She looked positively aghast. Once more she showed him the deep suspicion of him that lurked in her soul.

"You think I'm not speaking the truth?" he accused her, but very gently. "Don't deny it; your eyes arraign me too plainly. Well, I assure you, on my solemn word, that, of the half-dozen times on which I drove Miss Varick out last term, we went



almost always to Bath, did a show, had tea in a crowded restaurant and came home again."

"*Half a dozen times?*" almost whispered Dilys.

"I won't swear to the exact number of occasions, but it can't have been much more; may have been less. Did she lead you to suppose otherwise?"

"She told me, quite distinctly, otherwise. She always said—when she was going off—'Armie, as usual.'"

His well-cut lip curled, so that Dilys could see the gap left at one side of the lower jaw by the loss of two teeth, not yet replaced.

"She did me the honour to use me as camouflage, Miss Pendered." After a minute's thought he added, "It's hard to see why. She might have gone about with anyone she pleased. Why play with the feelings of a man who, as she might have seen, was very much in earnest?"

"I can't think," murmured Dilys in blank perplexity.

In her mind was an idea which nothing would have induced her to put into words. It was that Irma must have been conducting an affair with a married man, and perhaps intended after all to fall back on Philip when things got too dangerous, or she tired of her present sport. If that were so, and if Philip had accidentally discovered the truth that night in the mill, one could better understand his attitude since her disappearance.

Dilys was so pale that Philip, seeing she had not touched her tea, pushed back his chair suddenly and, marching to the door, gave a quick order to the waiter.

"What you want and what you are going to have is a cocktail, my child," said he. "Pour away that cold cup of tea, have a drink, smoke a cigarette, and then you'll be able to eat something."

Dil opened her mouth to protest, but the waiter arrived so promptly with a couple of Bronxes on a tray that she yielded, knowing in her heart that she was perilously near the end of her strength. Having adopted Philip's suggestion, she rallied noticeably, and after a quarter of an hour felt able to discuss the fresh pot of tea and the savoury sandwiches put before her.

Armitage showed at his very best. All roughness disappeared from his manner and he began to speak about a soirée shortly to be given by the male half to the female half of the University. He was on the committee which was making the arrangements, and he asked her advice on one or two trifling matters with a charming deference. It was all of no importance and did not call for mental effort on her part, but it soothed down her trouble, helped her to pull herself together and brought a tinge of colour to her white cheeks.

Her face needed only that tinge to make it lovely, and the man watched her expression with an appreciation so keen as to be almost painful.

The news she had told him of what Garrie knew, and of the discovery of Irma's little pochette by the police, had given him a warning that he might be on the verge of considerable unpleasantness. He betrayed, however, no sign of nervousness. His usual manner of considerate friendliness stood him in good stead.



Without hurry, but likewise without delay, he made a meal, saw with relief that she too ate something, and took her back to the car, where he settled her in cushioned comfort, and routed out from a pocket something which he said his mother had one day left there and which he had ever since meant to give back to her, but had always forgotten. It was a bottle of lavender salts, and Dil, who never used such things, was glad of it.

They drove back almost silently until they were three parts of the way home ; then, just before they entered the town and before the street lamps began, Armitage said without warning : " I expect you miss Irma a good deal ? "

That was too much for Dilys. " If I only knew . . . only knew . . . what had become of her," she gasped ; and melted into weeping, to her own helpless wrath and shame.

The man brought the car to a standstill at the side of the road.

" I can't stand this," he said in a voice of what sounded like smothered rage. " Listen to me. It seems that my word—even my oath—doesn't carry conviction to you ; but I do want, if I can, to find some way of persuading you—of making you believe that Irma is safe and sound. She is, I assure you she is ; that is to say, she was when I parted from her. You'd feel happier, wouldn't you, if you could feel confident of that ? "

She could not talk, for sobbing still shook her, but she made a murmur that sounded like assent.

"Poor little girl," he muttered in a breaking voice ; and then, almost immediately, as though he felt the danger in which he stood if he should yield to sentiment, he added sharply, "Come, child !—hold up now ! I should hate your nose to be red ! Consider what a big girl you are, and turn off the tap when I tell you."

"Oh !" gasped Dil, not quite knowing whether she felt outraged or amused, "I *am* a silly ass, but what with one thing and another I believe I'm a bit overwrought. There ! I'm all right now ; and—and please, Professor Armitage, don't bring it up against me in future ! I hope you'll never see me lose hold of myself again, so do overlook it this once."

He replied in the same half-mocking tone that she had used for her final plea. "All is forgotten and forgiven, on one condition—quite an easy one—that we continue our coaching course together ?"

There was a short pause. "You will take that to imply that I—I think you're telling me the truth ? I mean, if I go on condescending to allow you to help me to win a scholarship, you'll forget all that we have said this afternoon ?"

He gave a short laugh, half-scorn, half-embarrassment. "Oblivion is perhaps not so easy as all that ; but yes—if you'll agree to at least temporary amnesia, I will also."

"Let's leave it at that then," sighed Dilys.

"I still hear the doubt in your voice ; but give me the benefit of it. I won't ask more—at present."



IF Superintendent Hayes thought it likely that Professor Armitage, having been warned of the police inquiry, would visit Welwych Mill that night he was disappointed. For one thing, the weather gave no excuse for such a visit, being both cold and overcast. The Professor dined in hall, passed the evening in the comfort of the College common room, and thence went peaceably home to bed.

The exhaustive search which took place up at the mill the following day was quite undisturbed and wholly unproductive. A systematic beating of the spinney across the road likewise yielded nothing.

Signs were there found of some kind of cleaning up having taken place, at a point whereat a car had evidently been parked ; but beyond some lumps of cotton waste, spent matches and trampled turf there was nothing suspicious. Several pails of dirty water had apparently been poured away, suggesting that a car had been washed down.

No footprints were discernible, and, though they carried away for analysis several lumps of cotton waste, they could see no traces upon them which suggested blood, and were not hopeful that any would be found.

A man who could be trusted had been told off to keep a close watch upon the movements of the suspect, in case he might run away.

"If he'd wanted to run, one 'ud think he'd have started sooner," remarked Hayes ; to which his Chief replied that he would probably have sense enough to

remain long enough to avert suspicion, but might now think it feasible to vanish quietly.

"What excuse 'ud he give if he pushed off now?" Hayes wanted to know. "He'd have to fake up a dead relation or a doctor's certificate to make it sound natural in the middle of term; and since he's heard we're after him, he knows well enough that in either case we could and should call his bluff."

"Yes, I grant you it's not easy for him to leave his post in term-time," replied the Colonel testily. The fruitlessness of the further search at the mill had vexed him. A whole day's trouble and expense with no result! A find there would have brought suspicion home to Armitage; whereas a find in the waters of the estuary would open up other possibilities.

"Those tyre-marks of his ought to have been valuable," said Hayes, also depressed. "But he's had his blooming car out every day since and our chaps can't find a thing on it to show it had been on that road. He's cleaned it pretty thoroughly since—did that at the beginning of the week, before they put us on the job. If I might be allowed the freedom, sir, I'd say this idea of keeping things dark is ruin to us. We've got plenty of evidence now for him to be detained and questioned—more than enough to my thinking; and once we had him under our hand we could keep him there."

"But not without public knowledge," snapped the Colonel. "I'm with you, as you know, and I might have talked over those two good ladies; but in face of this confounded wire, what can I do but wait?"



He drew from his pocket a telegram which had reached Miss Hawke from Evian the previous night and which she had at once sent on to him.

Suggestion in letter *re* P.A. simply preposterous. Do nothing further till my arrival 10.6 Sunday night.

VARICK.

"That's what they keep on saying the whole time," commented Hayes, frowning. "You've heard 'em, sir, all in chorus. Young Ord, all the ladies as well. Armitage is their white-headed boy, and they won't believe he could hurt a fly. Well, in my experience, sir, they're the dangerous ones. Let a man like that once run amuck and he's so astonished to think he's done such a thing that he goes clean off his chump and gets reckless."

This conversation took place in the Chief's private room, and after it he ordered his car and went up the town to see Mrs. Gray and to ask her to let him know the moment that Professor Varick arrived on the scene.

He found Miss Hawke with her, and the two ladies were eager to confide to him the fact that Dilys Pendered had confronted Armitage with the tale of the finding of the pochette, and had returned from the interview quite sure that he was not to blame in the matter of the disappearance.

Naturally Colonel Borrow wanted to know what Armitage had had to say for himself.

The reply was that he had declined any kind of discussion as to what took place on Friday night,

although he admitted that he had seen Irma. He had consented to say that to the best of his knowledge and belief she was perfectly safe and sound ; and to add the assurance that he did not know where she was. His manner had carried conviction most certainly to the girl who interviewed him ; and she had told the two ladies of the curious circumstance which had come out as it were accidentally in the course of her conversation with him—namely, that for months past Irma had been telling people she was going out with him when such had not really been the case.

“ ‘ Using him as camouflage,’ was the way he expressed it,” said Mrs. Gray ; “ but it sounds to me ridiculous. Why should not Irma go out with whom she chose ? Why should she lead others to suppose it to be one person rather than another ? ”

“ Because,” replied the Colonel promptly, “ Armitage’s high reputation was a protection to her. She was up to something of which she was ashamed. Intrigue with a married man in all probability.”

“ O-oh ! ” breathed Miss Hawke in great agitation. “ And now she has actually gone away with him ! No wonder she left no word for us ! . . . Oh ! this all fits in with her duplicity about going to her aunt at Ivybridge, when really she was doing something quite different. How we have been mistaken in her ! It makes one ready to believe anything, even of Professor Armitage—it really does.”

“ And how,” asked the Colonel abruptly after an emotional pause, “ how do you suppose her pochette got into the river ? ”



"She must have dropped it overboard. I expect they crossed to Wales by the ferry," suggested Mrs. Gray.

The Chief was silent. He was thinking of the bloodshed up at the mill, and the marks of those small, clutching fingers upon the screen—since fully identified as belonging to Miss Varick. He rose and went to the window, gazing forth with unseeing eyes at the dreary, silent, respectable Sunday afternoon solitude of the Victorian square.

Into the quiet drifted the raucous sound of newsboys, crying a special edition of a Sunday paper. It drew nearer, and, as he still stood there, thinking over his problem, there appeared a lad running, holding before him a big white and scarlet contents-bill, damp from the press.

HORRIBLE FIND ON CARSDON BEACH.  
SUIT-CASE FULL OF BLOODSTAINED CLOTHING !  
STRONG SUSPICION OF FOUL PLAY !

The Chief Constable started visibly. With a muttered "Excuse me !" he darted from the room, out into the hall and down the three front-door steps into the road.

The boy had gone by, but returned on being loudly hailed, and Borrow hastened back into the house, clutching a paper and scarlet with annoyance.

The police had the strictest orders ! No publicity ! Yet this had found its way into that enterprising local rag, the "Gorchester Bulletin," lately founded.

. . . Of course this find might be entirely unrelated, but—but somehow . . .

“Did you hear?” he asked the ladies, who had both gone to the window on his startling exit and had both seen the news-sheet.

He unfolded the paper, wherein the scare-lines extended right across the front page, and the ladies read with bated breath :

By a most curious coincidence, a strange find was made this morning about 10.30 by our special correspondent, who happened to be walking on the shore, half a mile below Carsdon. The tide was going down and, as he stood gazing absent-mindedly at the water, a squarish-shaped object became gradually visible, half embedded in the sloppy sand—we will not call it mud!—of our famous estuary. Wading out, with some damage to Sunday shoes, he dragged it in and it proved to be an old and battered canvas suit-case of a cheap kind, having upon it the remains of three initials hardly legible, but two of which are guessed to be D. and A. The first may be P. or B.

The finder had the curiosity to open this bit of flotsam, which was not locked. Inside, hastily rolled up, he found an almost new lady's frock, a little coat<sup>ee</sup> to match, a scarf, a pair of pale coloured suede gloves. All these articles were more or less wet, and at first sight looked like rags ; but on being unrolled they proved to be of the finest quality, and each and all of them was thickly stained with blood—in fact the dress seemed to have been made use of to wipe up or stanch a flow of blood. There was also a man's soft collar, unmarked, of the kind which usually has a shirt to match, a necktie and a Fair-isle pullover, likewise much stained.

Several large stones had been inserted doubtless with



a view to sinking the case containing them. Apparently it had been completely sunk, and it is conjectured that the dredgers which have been at work for the past four-and-twenty hours in this part of the estuary may have dislodged it from the mud and flicked it to the shallow side. Until the tide began to run out, it would have been quite invisible.

Having examined his gruesome discovery, our correspondent thought it his duty to carry it to P.C. Bunce, the officer in charge at Alwey, the nearest village to the point where it was found.'

Colonel Borrow flung the paper from him with some violence. "Just our luck," he remarked bitterly. "The police knew there was to be no publicity, these fools in charge of the dredging knew it too ; and one of these vultures, these pressmen, had the luck to find it ! And was very careful to get his report into his paper before hunting up poor old Bunce ! May I use your telephone, Mrs. Gray ? "

Out he strode into the hall, and a perfect rain of orders were at once issued to headquarters. Professor Armitage was to be brought at once to the Colonel's private room. If Bunce had not already handed over the suit-case he was to take a fast car and produce it instantly. All copies of the special edition of the "Bulletin" containing the news were to be confiscated and destroyed and the paper warned. There was hardly room for doubt that they knew of the orders against any reference in the Press to the affair.

In a highly nettled condition the Chief then took leave of the two ladies, having first ascertained that Mrs. Gray was putting up the Varicks and was going

down to the station with her car that night to meet them. He begged that, unless the Professor was too exhausted by travelling he should be brought straight on to police headquarters at once. Having arranged this, he got into his car and hastened away leaving two ladies so perturbed that they might almost have been called distraught. Miss Hawke was as white as ashes. The only words that she was able to murmur were "Philip Dennison Armitage."

"What is that you say?" asked Mrs. Gray, puzzled.

"His initials . . . on the suit-case . . ." was the faint and faltering response. "P. D. A."

Mrs. Gray gathered up the paper flung aside by the irate Colonel and read, "A D.," she muttered, "and an A. The other one may be B. or P. . . . You are right, my dear. Philip Dennison Armitage. I didn't know—I don't think I ever heard—that he was called Dennison. Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Positive. And I simply feel as if I couldn't think at all. Oh, Mrs. Gray, do let us ring up Professor Dalton, and Miss Ord as well—they are both safe, and I feel as if you and I could not bear this alone any longer."



## CHAPTER XXI      MORE SHOCKS FOR DILYS

DILYS was terribly eager, after her experience with Armitage at Carsdon, to see Garrie and tell him—all?—well, perhaps not *all*, but the gist of what had passed between them. But, having twice the previous day rung him up with no result, she felt a certain reluctance to do so again.

She was therefore a good deal relieved when she came out from Dalton's lecture at lunch-time on Saturday to find Garrie waiting for her, and gladly accepted his instant suggestion that she lunch with him at "Uck."

No sooner were they seated at table than she plunged into the topic of her yesterday's drive and talk. She soon discovered that her cousin was quite seriously displeased with her for having accepted an invitation to drive with the man over whom hung so dark a suspicion. This caused her not merely annoyance, but resentment, seeing the effort of courage it had needed to screw herself up to the point of making the venture; and they came nearer to quarrelling than they had ever been before.

"How was I to find out anything without asking?" cried she passionately; to which Garrie replied dryly:

"Should you expect a guilty man, when cornered, to tell the truth?"

"Yes," she retorted defiantly; "if it was Armie I should."

"And did he? If so, I should be very glad to know it."

"No, he didn't. He wouldn't," she admitted reluctantly ; "but I am as sure as sure can be that he isn't guilty."

"What makes you so sure? You confronted him, I presume, with at least some of the very awkward facts ; and what line did he take?"

"He—he did make one or two admissions. For instance, he owned that Irma had been with him that evening."

"Oh, he confessed that, did he? After being told that I saw them together, I suppose?"

"Ye-es."

"Well? What then?"

"He asked me if I seriously suggested that he had made away with Irma. Somehow, when he put it like that it sounded ludicrous. However, I wouldn't say that I was certain he hadn't. I begged him to explain, and he answered that he must decline to discuss the matter with me. He said he would make two statements and that was all. I could take them or leave them."

"And they were?"

"First, that to the best of his knowledge and belief Irma is safe and sound ; and also that he does not know where she is."

"And that convinced you? I mean to say, you accepted those statements as true?"

"I—I suppose I implied as much. You see, Garrie, we were there together having tea at his expense in a public room and I had no other way of getting home except in his car. . . ."



"That's just what I say. You ought not to have put yourself in such a position ; and what good have you done ? Got nothing out of him, and left yourself under an obligation to him——"

"Unfortunately I am already under such a big obligation to him that a cup of tea doesn't sound much in comparison. He is giving me lessons for nothing in my most difficult subject, and I simply can't do without them."

"Dil ! I'd rather you chucked the whole of this doctor scheme than that you should get yourself involved with Armie after what has happened."

Dil's sweet mouth took on obstinate lines. "I can't help it, Garrie. I don't believe he has done any harm to Irma——"

"Facts seem against you, my dear."

"I don't see it. Think a minute, Garrie. It is known that Irma had week-end leave the week before all this happened, and it is also known that she did *not* spend it, as supposed, with Miss Bond at Ivybridge. Well, did she spend it with Armie ? You know he had nothing at all to do with it, he was here in Gorchester every minute of the time——"

"But, you sweet silly, don't you see that what you are saying makes it all the more fatally likely that Armie and she had a terrible row ? She was on with somebody else, she was making a fool of him, and that night he somehow found it out——"

Dilys sat there staring at him, growing whiter and whiter under his eyes. "Why, yes," she whispered at last, "I do know that much. She *had* been making

use of his name—oh, for a couple of terms, at least—telling me and others that she had been out with him, when she was with someone else——”

“How did *you* find out that?”

“From—him. Quite by chance. I mentioned a certain occasion when he had taken her, so she said, to a certain place, and he told me flatly that it was untrue. . . . He said that he had not been out with her half a dozen times, this term and last.”

“So that was it! And you know his temper. He’s the devil when he’s wrought up,” muttered Garrie. “Now, Dil, I’m going to tell you something that I haven’t even told the police. I hate to have to mention it to you, but I’m bound to stop by any means I can your being drawn in by Armitage. That night I was up at the mill—after I found the blood on the floor—I had the most awful creepy feeling that something had happened in that place just a few minutes before I came in. I crept round those screens and I was quite prepared to find a corpse lying on the bed. It wouldn’t have surprised me. The bed had been made, but it looked to me a bit hasty—as if the coverlet had been pulled up, but it was rumpled underneath; and so I pulled it down a bit.” He drew a quick breath. “There were splashes of blood on the sheet and pillow.”

There was a dead silence, while a waitress asked them what more they would have. Dil shook her head mutely and Garrie ordered cheese.

“Last night, up at Dalton’s, when the Chief Constable got talking to me,” resumed Garrie, “he said



they have identified her fingerprints, clutching the edge of the screen."

"Oh, Garrie——" It was hardly more than a whisper, and, gazing ruefully at her, Garrie was horrified at her aspect. She looked as if mortally stricken. "They—the police—do they think he did it?" she faltered.

"Oh, Hayes is evidently convinced he did. But now, my dear, listen to this," he went on doggedly, averting his eyes from the agony in her face. "A man who has committed a crime for the first time in his life—a wholly unpremeditated crime done in a sudden madness of anger—is sometimes driven to commit a second in order to cover his tracks. The second one's a different kind of crime altogether—done to make himself safe. Why do you suppose I told you what I have just told you? To warn you that Armitage may think you know too much; that you are, or may become, a danger to him."

Dil closed her eyes. In fancy she was standing in the gathering dusk on the verge of the cliff garden, with Philip close, very close, behind her. At that moment he had been moved she well knew by some strong emotion. Was it *that*? The knowledge that she was dangerous to him, and that he must avert the danger either by another crime or by the worse treachery of drawing her closer to him, enlisting her sympathy, *making love to her*?

Garrie had continued talking, but she had lost all count of what he was saying. Presently he leaned over the table and tapped with his fingers to capture

her wandering attention. "Dil, listen to me! Until this matter is cleared up you must not go out again with Armie. Do you hear? You mustn't. I shall get Aunt Ag to tell you so. Has he suggested another date? Tell me the truth, please."

That nettled her. "Garrie, I always tell the truth! Are you suspecting me now as baselessly as you are suspecting him——"

"Baselessly? Oh, Dil——" He was too hurt to say more. He stared at his plate and grew crimson.

"I don't mind," said she chokingly, "telling you that Professor Armitage did ask if I'd go out with him to-morrow. I gave him no definite answer."

Garrie drew a deep breath. "Then please tell him very definitely that you are engaged to lunch *and* tea at Majendie Terrace to-morrow," he said masterfully. Adding after a pause, "Forgive me, my dear, but you are so sweet and—and so"—he fumbled for a word—"so *dawn-young*, that you must be taken care of."

She made an exclamation of impatient contempt, but her voice as she replied was nevertheless rather tremulous. "I am of your opinion that I had better not go about with him. Taking up with him the moment he is off with Irma, the Kittery girls would say! If Aunt Ag will let me come to her to-morrow I shall be really grateful; but, Garrie, do please understand that as far as this coaching goes, these extra lessons, I simply can't back out. It's not such a very exceptional thing, as you know it is done fairly often for a pupil who is supposed to be promising. We sit in plain sight in the lecture-room, where anyone



can come in or go out. There's no privacy about it. And both he and I are strictly business-like. If I decline to go on it would look awfully marked, wouldn't it? Besides destroying every earthly chance I've got."

Garrie hesitated. To fling back in the face of a professor—and such a highly-thought-of coach as Armitage—an offer of gratuitous tuition would indeed be an extreme measure, and he knew it.

"Now that the Chief Constable is on the job," he remarked reflectively, "it can't be long before things come to a head. Couldn't you be ill for this one afternoon and send him a note to say you are unable to take your lesson?"

She shook her head with decision. "No, Garrie, I can't and won't do that. I've got all my stuff prepared and I must come up to the scratch. But I'll promise not to go out with him afterwards, as he may suggest."

"I don't understand him," muttered Garrie. "He never spoke to you before out of class, did he? Why this sudden crush on you? Oh, I know well enough you're attractive, but not in the way I suppose him to admire. I feel he wants as it were to keep his finger on your pulse; to know, through you, how far the hunt is up; and that makes me want to punch his head."

After a minute, "I thought you and he were such friends," she pondered aloud.

"Tell you the truth, I haven't been able to talk to him at all since that night," replied Garrie frankly. "After his trying to fill me up with fictions, and in

face of what I knew, I couldn't be natural with him, and he must have noticed it. I've kept on changing my mind about him, one day being certain he was all right, the next day feeling the evidence couldn't be got over. I know the police are positive that he has made away with her——”

“Then why don't they arrest him?”

“For more than one reason. You have to be pretty careful, you know, about arresting a man for murder; and moreover, the College authorities and also Irma's family are in such a stew about letting the thing be made public. If they have him up and question him, and if as a result of that examination they detain him, you can't well keep that dark, can you?”

“I suppose not. He—he doesn't seem to be much disturbed about it though. Ever since Monday he has been going quite quietly about his business——”

“But they've got a man watching him all the time to see he doesn't get away. He may not be aware of it, but they know all he does. They told me he had taken you out in his car—you were watched as you left together, and a man went to Carsdon on a motor-bike to keep an eye on you. Do you wonder that I don't want you to be seen about with him, little innocent?”

Her consternation was evident. “Why didn't you tell me that before?” she cried with passion. She felt glad that she had, as Armie advised, pulled herself together, gone into the hotel and taken her tea as though nothing out of the way were happening. All



that time they were being watched—it was not merely the waiter with whom they had to reckon. She had a dim memory of a cyclist at a table near. . . .

She pushed back her chair. “I can’t eat any more, Garrie. This is simply awful,” she said. “If I am to collect my faculties so as to be able to take a lesson, I must go upstairs to the rest-room and sit there in quiet until three o’clock——”

“Rather do that than come out in the *Pêche*?” he asked wistfully. “I’m frightfully sorry to have rattled you so badly, but I felt I had to put a stopper on—on any sort of a chumming-up between you and Armitage. You can see for yourself that it wouldn’t do, can’t you?”

She nodded mutely, murmuring vague words of thanks to him for her lunch. Then she escaped from his eager solicitude and ran upstairs to the delightfully comfortable sitting-room which is the sole property of the girl students.

Being Saturday, the room was almost empty, and after she had sat about half an hour by the fire she found herself quite alone and could lean back, close her eyes and relax.

She fought for composure, she prayed with locked hands that she might be mistress of herself. It was vital, simply vital, that she should not put herself in danger of breaking down—of being unable to continue working for her coveted degree.

Who could have foreseen such a complication as this?

Her object in going out with Armie the previous

day had been simply to sound him concerning Irma—to obtain for herself reassurance if possible.

And she had found herself in contact with some feeling of elemental intensity, some drawing force of magnetism which had as it were swept her into its orbit. She was by no means a conceited girl, but she had a kind of inner knowledge that the trouble with Philip was not concerned with Irma but with herself. What he wished was that she should believe in him. What he could not bear was that she should condemn him.

She knew that, unless she could thrust right away from her Garrie's suggestion that Philip was afraid of her because she knew too much for his safety, she simply could not go through the lesson that lay before her.

For by no means the first time she was testing her inner strength—calling upon herself to rally to the attack, to stand four-square to the disintegrating forces she had to meet; and by degrees she knew she was achieving mastery. Calmness and power were succeeding to weak agitation. She was able to take up the books which lay beside her and to concentrate upon the printed word—to link it with its appropriate idea.

At five minutes to three she rose and walked along the corridors firmly and without haste to confront the one man in the world who had power to shake her composure.

She had hardly settled into her seat and found her places before she heard the quick step, the impetuous



closing of the door, the purposeful stride that announced his coming.

"Well," he said, in his kindest but most professional manner, "I hope you are none the worse for yesterday's somewhat perturbed outing?"

"Thank you, I am all right," she replied steadily, "and you will be able to judge of my mental condition by the work I've got through, won't you?"

"More or less, I suppose. At any rate, I am hoping you were not so definitely put off me as a fellow-traveller that you are unwilling to come again this afternoon? We won't go so far this time—only to the coaching inn at the top of the Mendips."

"Thanks very much, but I have an appointment with a friend this afternoon as soon as ever I can get away," was her prompt reply.

"That's disappointing," he said, in a tone distinctly conveying not merely regret but some resentment. "But how about to-morrow? We might get off before lunch; and really it's tempting fate to allow this prolonged Indian summer to pass without making full use of it."

"You're very kind, Professor; but to-morrow I am booked both to lunch and tea with my cousin Miss Ord at Majendie Terrace." As she spoke she felt an impulse of warm gratitude to Garrie for fixing her with so definite an engagement, for it enabled her to refuse quite naturally, with no pause of indecision, no fumbling for an excuse.

Armitage made a sound of keen irritation. "What an engaged kind of person you are!" he said, half-

laughing but, as she could see, with very real vexation. "Well, at least you must keep Monday for me. And now let us lose no time in getting to work"—he spoke as though taking consent for granted and as though determined to leave her no chance to say no to this third invitation.

He could always chain Dil's attention, and to her joy she found that to-day was no exception. They studied together in such harmony and such a keen sense of mutual satisfaction as one may suppose to have existed between Louis Moore and Shirley during their French lessons.

At five minutes to four he took the book away from before her eyes and closed it, flinging it on the table with a bang. "Come," said he, "we don't part until we have fixed up something. How about Monday? Any pressing engagement for Monday next?"

She answered with composure. "You can hardly expect me to say that yet, Professor Armitage. None of my hours are fixed for next week, and I must see Professor Dalton first and probably Mr. Parry too."

It was neatly got out of, but evidently it did not convince Philip, for his brows came together like a thundercloud.

"Dilys," he said in a curious voice—to herself she said it was like a lion-tamer's voice—"look at me. Just look me steadily in the eyes."

It was the moment of crisis and Dil's quiet time of preparation enabled her to meet it. She was gathering her books to fasten them with a strap and there was a



brief delay before she raised her limpid gaze to his wide, flaming look, which seemed as though it would devour her.

Scorching though it was, it seemed that victory was to her : the sheer conquest of wrath by simplicity.

Philip's look changed, softened, dwelt upon her with a pleading far harder to withstand than his anger.

"Dil——" he began, then choked back his intended words. "Go, my child," he said very quietly ; "you are quite right. . . . But we will have our lesson on Monday, shall we not ?"

"Oh, yes, please—if you are kind enough——"

He stood up, walked away, came back and said with a shy laugh, "Blake ! It's something out of Blake that you remind me of ! How does it go ?"

Saying, wrath by His meekness  
And by His health, sickness  
Are driven away from our immortal day !

Standing by her, he went on gently, "I accept my half loaf. Will you shake hands ? I shall appreciate it very much if you feel you can."

Her hand came forth impetuously, readily. He took it in his, holding it strongly for a moment. The clock was striking four, and along the corridor came whistling—Garrie's unmistakable whistling.

He pushed open the door. "Miss Pendered there ? Come along, Dil, I've got the *Pêche* waiting for you."

GARRIE and Dilys took but a short drive that Saturday afternoon, pleasant though the weather was.

She seemed thoroughly out of spirits, said she had much work to get through before bedtime, and begged to be deposited at the Kittery before tea.

Garrie was wise enough to let her have her own way ; but he drove up to St. Bede's to service on Sunday morning and was awaiting her as she emerged.

She looked much calmer and more natural than she had done the previous day ; in fact, to him she appeared consoled and steeped in spiritual peace. The prayer that she and Garrie had just been praying seemed to have been answered :

"O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us Thy Peace."

She felt glad to see Garrie's alert face, and to know that he was doing his best to guard her from the attack of some insidious—no, not a foe—some insidious power which fascinated her while she feared it, and which she only very partially understood.

They packed into the *Pêche* together, and it was as they were descending the hairpin bend which unites the upper and lower town that, just outside the newspaper kiosk at the corner, she caught sight of the flaming poster of the "Gorchester Bulletin."

"Oh, Garrie, look !" cried she. "Slow down a moment. Have you a penny handy ; we must buy a copy of this !"



"All rot, you may depend," said Garrie rather crossly ; "but here's a penny—I can't stop here with the traffic cop at my heels—the boy sees you—catch hold !"

Dil secured the paper deftly, held it before her, and made out the few first sentences. "Oh, Garrie," she gasped, "I'm afraid ! I'm afraid !"

"Hold on till we get home ; we'll go into the garage so as to be able to devour the news before confronting Aunt Ag. Only hope she hasn't seen it on her way home from the cathedral !"

Side by side, in the home which the *Pêche* shared with Aunt Ag's venerable car, they read the sickening tidings.

"That's torn it," remarked Garrie at length. "No more chance of keeping things dark. This'll force Armie into the open, won't it ? Observe his initials on the suit-case ?"

Dilys, as may be supposed, had observed.

"Vote we don't show this to Aunt Ag unless she has already seen the poster," mused Garrie, refolding the paper after some discussion. "If we do, we shall talk of nothing else all lunch-time, and I'm so afraid of this thing settling permanently on your nerves, my dear child, and spoiling your chances. You leave it to Uncle Garrie, and we'll find some way to divert our thoughts into other channels. There's nothing we can do about this, so let's try and forget it."

Dil assented with deep gratitude. "I don't feel as if I can bear much more of it, and that's the truth. . . . If Philip Armitage killed Irma and flung her body

into the sea and then went on doing his work here calmly as if nothing had happened . . . then I shall begin to believe in the kind of thing that modern novelists try to drive in with a hammer—namely, that passion makes wild beasts of the best and most intellectual of men. I never have believed it, I simply can't believe it ; and what's more, I *don't* believe it, even now, in face of this last blow."

" You're a loyal friend, my girl."

" I think I'm simply a sensible woman. My reason tells me that such a thing can't be true of Armie. It might be true of a medieval Moor like Othello, I know nothing of that ; I wasn't born in that epoch, and I know nothing of the Oriental mind. But don't, oh, don't let's talk about it any more—help me to shake it off, Garrie, please do ! "

At lunch Garrie put a question to his aunt. " Dilys is working like a horse and has got to go on doing it all the term. She's had, as you know, the folly to win the Wavertree, and all the staff are on to her like flies to honey. In these painful circs. which do you think is best for her this afternoon—to sit quietly over the fire, or to go for a car run and eat the air ? "

Aunt Ag gave it as her opinion that the most tiring thing in the whole world was to sit round the fire and make conversation. " But if you go out, where is there to go these short afternoons ? " she inquired.

" You did say you wanted to go to that special what - do - you - call - it service in Wells Cathedral ? " suggested Garrie. " I'll make a noble offer. If you'll come along, Aunt Ag, I'll drive the aged ' Wayfarer.' "



This was the serviceable but by no means smart four-seater which belonged to Miss Ord, and which they used when they were more than two in number. As Miss Ord had no reason to suppose that either Garrie or Dilys was sentimentally desirous of a *solitude-à-deux*, she allowed herself to be persuaded to the outing, and they set off in good time, the two young people in front, Aunt Ag and the tea behind.

They did not go by the main 'bus route but by a way which Garrie knew of where there was very little traffic, and which a little before four o'clock brought them to a place with a fine view. There they paused to do justice to the sumptuous tea provided, and then drove on down to the cathedral, where a special service was being held at 5.30 to dedicate a window newly presented by some of the residents in memory of a near friend of Miss Ord. It was for this reason that when Mrs. Gray rang up that afternoon to beg her friend to come and discuss the terrible find of the bloodstained clothing, she was told that she was out and would not be home until a good deal later.

When they dropped Dilys, on their return, at the Kittery just in time for supper, she was much refreshed both in body and mind, her attention having been successfully diverted so that horrors retreated into the background for a time.

Quite early in the afternoon the posters had all been swept away from the streets and the special edition of the paper containing the story suppressed by order of the Chief Constable.

As for Philip Armitage, after a wakeful night, feeling

too restless to stay quietly anywhere, he fetched his car and set out alone about ten o'clock in the morning, driving to a high and remote part of the hills where there was a chalk quarry, five miles from anywhere. He parked his car at the inn of a tiny hamlet, walked the five miles, and spent the sunny hours wandering round the lonely place with a hammer, in search of a perfect example of a certain fossil which he wanted to have in the museum. He was much preoccupied in his search, and also in the thoughts that filled his mind ; but after a time he became vaguely aware that he had apparently a fellow-enthusiast ; in other words, there was a man wandering round among the hillocks in a somewhat aimless fashion.

This man was by no means intrusive. He kept carefully out of range of conversation. When Armitage sat down to eat his sandwiches of bread and cheese and to smoke his pipe, the stranger also settled himself and appeared to be munching something, followed by a whiff of tobacco.

Philip soon lost consciousness of him, so absorbed was he in his own troubles, which held him to the exclusion of everything else. As he sat there brooding, arms folded and brows knit as he smoked pipe after pipe, his aspect was distinctly that of a man with something on his mind—something of almost crushing weight. Had Colonel Borrow seen him then, guard down, he would have said at once, " This is the aspect of one with a crime on his conscience."

As time went on the other occupant of the quarry had unostentatiously disappeared and had worked



round, out of sight, so that he could survey the Professor himself unseen.

"Got the mask off proper, so he has," he mused. "This is where I shall lose him, and lose him for good, if he means to be off, for he can walk twice as far and as fast as what I can. Silly ass I was to follow on foot, but how was I to tell he'd be goat enough to leave his car five miles from the place he wanted to come to?"

Armitage stirred at last, the brief afternoon having faded, and walked back to the inn without meeting a soul all the way. It was not until he had ordered and sat down to enjoy a substantial tea that he espied from the window the supposed geologist, limping sorely, approaching the inn.

He watched him as he reached the door, entered, peered wistfully into the dining-room; and the look of relief which appeared on his tired face when he perceived that Philip was there was too obvious to be ignored.

So that was it! But of course! Naturally they would set a watch on him; that is, if they knew as much as Miss Pendered did. He had in fact expected it, though not until to-day had it been noticeable. There had been no malice on his own part in leading his pursuer into such a wild and remote place as that in which he had passed the day, and he felt an impulse of compassion towards the unlucky sleuth, who was stoutish and most evidently no pedestrian. He looked quite done up, poor chap. "Faint, yet pursuing."

When, half an hour later, Philip rose and took up

his coat and hat, urged by his own special demon of mockery, he stopped as he passed the table where the man also was showing signs of departure, and asked with a smile, "Come from Gorchester?"

"Yes," was the reply in tones of would-be nonchalance. "Fine country up here, ain't it?"

"Can I offer you a lift back? I've got my car here," said Philip with a benevolent smile. He enjoyed the expression that crept into the other's eyes, taken aback, yet wary. "I noticed you seemed a bit footsore."

"That's all right, and thank you kindly. But I've got my motor-bike here," was the somewhat nervous reply.

"Good! Well, the roads are in fair condition. Think I'll try another route home—a good many jolly by-roads hereabouts, are there not?"

"They ain't much fun in the dark," was the sensible rejoinder, as the stranger set down his tea-cup.

"Well, if you follow me fairly closely, I know every inch of the way and I could pilot you," suggested Armie with his most mischievous twinkle.

"Follow you—eh? Why should I do that? I know the roads as well as what you do, I dessay."

"Oh, certainly. A well-meant offer, no offence intended. Good evening to you," said the tormentor lightly as he went out.

At the petrol pump in the yard he had his tank filled to capacity, and set off at a good round pace, in a direction leading almost due south. He could not resist the temptation to give the policeman a run



for his money, and he went miles out of his way to do it. When at last he reached his garage, he felt all the better for his act of folly. He had no idea whether or no he had thrown off his pursuer, but he had certainly acquired an appetite for supper. For this meal he went to a restaurant he knew of which was always open on Sunday nights. It was therefore nearly ten o'clock when he returned to his rooms, and was told by his landlady that there was a gentleman waiting to see him upstairs.

He had had a wash and brush-up before supper, so he went straight up to his sitting-room, and found a nice-looking young man in the uniform of a police sergeant awaiting him.

"Good evening, sir. I dare say you are not altogether surprised to see me?"

"Not altogether," replied Armitage easily. "Come for a little chat? Because, if so, I'll call for a couple of glasses." He went as he spoke to a cupboard, which he unlocked.

"Thank you, but the chat is to be with someone a good deal more important than myself. Colonel Borrow wants you to see him at headquarters, and has sent me to bring you along."

"I am willing to come, of course; but I ought to warn you that I have very little information to give upon the subject with regard to which I believe he wishes to question me."

"Yes, sir. You must say that, or anything else you have to say, to Colonel Borrow. Shall we go at once, sir?"

"If you're sure you won't," with a smiling gesture towards the whisky decanter. "No? Perhaps you are wise. Come along, and I'll tell Mrs. Dicks to leave the door on the latch."

"I—I'm not sure that you will be able to get back to-night, sir. It's nearly ten o'clock now."

"Oh, I feel sure you're mistaken," laughed Philip genially. "I must be back, you know, to get a night's rest. We professors have to earn our bread-and-butter."

"Just as you please," said the young sergeant civilly.

"What—think I'd better collect pyjamas, tooth-brush and razor?"

"If you are not able to come back to-night, the chief will send for your things, sir; but you might slip them into a bag ready for transport, if you don't mind my going upstairs with you."

"It's not upstairs—only through this door," was the rather bored reply, as the Professor passed into the back drawing-room, switching on the light. Methodically he put a few things into an attache case, with two or three books; then paused, as though struck by a sudden idea. "Not arresting me, are you? Not got a warrant or any such thing about you?"

The sergeant's reply was in the negative. "The Chief asked me to beg you to come if you possibly could, as he wished to make inquiries on a matter of great importance."

"That's that, then," replied Philip, depositing his bag on a chair near the door. He forthwith accompanied the officer downstairs, pausing, however, as he



had said he should, to tell Mrs. Dicks to leave the door on the latch for him.

He was somewhat annoyed upon reaching police headquarters to find himself kept waiting for at least half an hour in an anteroom. However, they invited him to smoke, so he submitted without protest, haunted by vague memories of police methods in tales he had read, in which suspects were purposely kept waiting in order to work them up into a state of nervous tension.

No such thing was visible in his manner when at last the summons came ; only a certain amount of reasonable surprise as he entered the Chief Constable's private room and found present with him Mrs. Gray, Miss Hawke, Professor Dalton, and Mr. and Mrs. Varick.

### *CHAPTER XXIII*

### *THE CHIEF CONSTABLE IS ANNOYED*

COLONEL BORROW rose from his writing-table at the entry of Armitage and bowed slightly but did not offer to shake hands. Professor Varick, however, hastened forward somewhat unsteadily and grasped his arm, clinging to it convulsively, his fine old face all glassy with tears.

“ Oh, Philip—my God, Philip—what is this they

have been telling me?" he quavered, his voice giving way altogether upon the last words.

The young professor escorted the old one tenderly back to his chair, wherein he placed him with a consoling pat on the shoulder. Meanwhile the Colonel was briefly apologizing for the delay which had just occurred. "Mr. and Mrs. Varick only arrived ten minutes ago," he explained, "and I felt obliged to make them acquainted with the position as far as we know it before calling you in."

"A pity," said Philip gravely, as he shook hands with the two lady wardens, and bent down to kiss Mrs. Varick with tenderness. "I might have spared them some of what they seem to be suffering. Cheer up, Uncle Frank and Aunt Sophy," he added sympathetically. "I'm very sorry for all this trouble, but I must say I don't quite understand it. You see, I've been kept in the dark all along and am anxious to hear anything that the Chief Constable can tell me."

This was a quite unlooked-for carrying of the war into the enemies' camp. The ladies looked up startled, and Colonel Borrow studied keenly the general appearance, air and bearing of the accused man. He did so with a sense of surprise. He had as it happened never met Professor Armitage, and had expected a different type. His first impression was that of good breeding, good manners, great physical strength and wonderful self-possession. A most attractive personality. Was the man completely innocent or was he a consummate actor? During the past week evidence had been collected about him from his many friends



—he had apparently no enemies—and among other brilliant qualities with which he was freely credited everyone had agreed what a good actor Armitage was. He was the star of the College Dramatic Society, and the penetrating eyes which were fixed upon him suspected that he was acting now.

“Surely it is a question rather of what you can tell me than of what I can tell you,” he said dryly. “Sit down, please, Mr. Armitage.” With a wave of his hand he indicated a seat facing him, across his writing-table. There was a reading-lamp on the table, and the shade had been previously so adjusted that a very strong light beat on the upstanding hair, fine brow and remarkable eyes of the man to be interrogated. Philip raised his hand.

“Could we have less glare, please?” he gently begged, pulling the shade down level. “My eyes are not overstrong, and I want to see you, and not merely a dazzle. Thanks.”

The Colonel eyed him keenly, but he felt he could hardly object. Putting out his hand, he switched off the table-light altogether, and ordered Hayes to draw the pendant light overhead down a trifle lower.

“Much better—thanks,” approved Philip. “Sorry to be so fussy. . . . And now as to the object of your sending for me to-night—you say you wish to question me?”

“I do. Upon the subject of Miss Varick’s disappearance.”

“We must clear the ground first a little, I think,” said Philip, courteously but firmly. “What is the

nature of this gathering here to-night? Is it a meeting among friends with the object of throwing light upon a puzzling fact, or is it a police process—the formal questioning of a suspected person? It makes all the difference, you know. Five of those present are my very good friends; but here are you, sir, and a full-sized policeman,” indicating Hayes, “who seems to have a note-book ready. Will what I say be taken down and perhaps”—he smiled a slightly derisive smile—“used in evidence against me?”

Colonel Borrow hesitated. He badly wanted to know what Armitage would say, and he felt sure from this preamble that he would get nothing from him if he knew he was to be formally questioned.

“I ought I suppose to tell you that the evidence against you is strong——”

“Evidence of what?” swiftly demanded Armitage.

“Evidence of your knowledge of foul play in connection with the disappearance of Miss Varick.”

Philip frowned. “In that case I must flatly decline to say anything except under the advice of my solicitor,” he replied coldly. “Do you consider it consistent with your dignity as Chief Constable to try and bluff me like this? You are placing me in an equivocal position, and I object.”

The Colonel cleared his throat. “It is a quarter to eleven and Sunday night,” he said. “I admit that you cannot summon your solicitor now. But let me put it to you that your refusal of information is a circumstance likely to tell against you.”

“I do not refuse any such information as I can give



—it is not much ; but I must impress upon you that it can only be given in confidence. I can speak, and will do so willingly before all these my friends, because I can trust them, and they have a right to know ; and though you and I have not previously met, I have heard enough about you, Colonel, to feel sure of your honour. But unless you will dismiss your large policeman, and unless I have your word of honour that you have no concealed shorthand writer or dictaphone or anything of the kind here, I decline to answer any question or to volunteer any information. Is that understood ? ”

Professor Varick leaned forward. Something in Armitage's calmness seemed to have reassured him. His tears were dry. “ I propose to you, Colonel Borrow, that you do just what Armitage suggests. I am positive that he will help us to the utmost of his ability. Let us keep this to ourselves as far as seems possible ; the more private this inquiry, the better we shall be pleased. I admit that, after to-day's revelations everything may be doubly difficult, but it is possible that what Armitage can tell us may suggest quite a new line of inquiry ; and if after we have heard him it seems to us that his answers are not satisfactory, why then you have your remedy ; you can detain him and question him formally.”

“ Thank you, sir,” said Philip quietly ; and both the ladies and Professor Dalton joined to beg earnestly that the talk might be entirely confidential.

“ Very well,” said the Colonel, after some thought. “ I suppose I had better do as you wish. Hayes, you

can go downstairs, and see that we are left quite undisturbed for the next half-hour."

The Superintendent left the room with a decidedly bad grace, and they heard his unwilling steps slowly descending the stairs.

Borrow was slightly put off his stroke. Philip's attitude had altered the whole position, and the manœuvring suggested to him the subtlety of an accomplished hypocrite.

"Do you feel able to make a statement to us?" he asked.

"No. I have no statement to make," replied Armitage promptly. "I am completely in a fog. It will be better for you to question me, and I will answer if I can."

"You know at least of the unaccountable disappearance of Mr. Varick's niece, Miss Irma Varick?"

"Yes. I have been told of that."

"Do I understand that you only know it by hearsay?"

"Certainly. She has not written to me."

"You were acquainted with her?" asked Borrow, slightly nettled.

"Oh, yes."

"I am told that when last seen she was in your company. Is that so?"

"I cannot be sure of that. Please don't think I am equivocating, but all I can tell you is the last occasion upon which I personally saw her. Others may have done so since."

"When was that?"



"I called for her by appointment on the evening of last Friday week at her rooms in Houston Square, shortly after eight o'clock I think it was ; and I drove her in my car up to the observatory on Welwych Moor—the windmill."

"Is it your habit, may I ask, to drive the lady students of the University up to so lonely a place at night?"

"That chiefly depends upon the state of the heavens. I have the only telescope available anywhere in this neighbourhood, and those of the students, male or female, who are interested in astronomy avail themselves of it a good deal."

"Is Miss Varick interested in astronomy?"

"Yes, she is. Although the subject is not in her curriculum she has been attending my course of lectures on relativity."

"May I ask whether you made use of the telescope that night?"

"Do you mean during the time that Miss Varick was there?"

"Er—yes. That was my meaning."

"No. We did not."

"Why not?"

"Because we were interrupted before Miss Varick had been with me ten minutes."

"By the arrival of another visitor?"

"Just so."

"And who was it?"

"A friend of Miss Varick's. He called for her and took her away with him."

"May we have his name, please?"

Philip raised his head and looked at him, gravely and unembarrassed. "This is where things grow complicated," he said. "You see, I swore to them both that I would not give them away." Had that not been so I should have come to Mrs. Gray on Friday evening when I was told that Miss Varick was missing."

The Colonel pushed away some papers with an exclamation of impatience. "No, sir, that won't do," he said sternly. "I know for a fact that Miss Hawke told you on Tuesday last that Miss Varick had not returned. She met you in the street, and you pretended to know nothing of the matter."

"Quite," was the steady and unruffled answer. "She did not tell me—in fact, she did not herself know—that Miss Varick had been seen up at the mill that night. Had she told me that I would have taken a different stand. But I had passed my word to both my visitors that night that, if I could help it, Miss Varick's presence there should not be known. What surprised me on Tuesday was not that she had not come back, but to find that Miss Hawke had not heard from her."

"You did not expect her to return then?"

"No. I felt sure she would not return," was the quiet, somewhat absent-minded reply.

"Good heavens, man, *you felt sure she would not return?* What reason had you—other than one too horrible to contemplate—to account for that certainty?"



Did you know that she *would* not or that she *could* not return ? ”

Philip blinked. “ Miss Varick was eloping,” he said, not actually smiling but quite evidently amused. “ I felt positive that she would communicate with Miss Hawke in course of a post or two, so I did all I could to dissuade Miss Hawke from calling in the police ; because I knew how furious Miss Varick and her—er—companion would be if there was a buzz of scandal and talk, which was just what they wanted to avoid.”

“ But this is nonsense,” broke in Miss Hawke in great agitation. “ Why should Irma elope ? She is her own mistress, and nobody can control her ! And why, having done so, should she leave us all in this terrible state, knowing not what has happened, imagining all kinds of dreadful things ? ”

“ If I may say so, Miss Hawke, these are questions which should be put to the young lady herself, and not to me,” answered Philip. “ I can suggest no reason, other than a morbid desire for secrecy.”

“ You are asking us to believe,” said the Chief in a hard voice, “ that Miss Varick left you, last Friday week, in her usual health and with a male companion ? ”

“ She certainly did, Colonel, whether you believe it or not.”

COLONEL BORROW leaned back in his chair gazing fixedly upon the face before him. He was an adept at reading the minds of those whom he interrogated, and he was acutely conscious that Armitage's perfect control of his features was the result of effort. There were fires smouldering below the polished surface of that equanimity. The man's emotions were deeply involved.

"I understand," he said abruptly, "that you have been away from Gorchester all day to-day?"

"That is so," said Philip; and a very slight smile which (like his last) had a derisive quality, flitted across his expressive mouth. "Sorry to have led your poor chap such a dance," he apologized. "It was tea-time before I tumbled to the fact that he was sleuthing me, and I simply couldn't resist a game of follow-my-leader. Had I known that you would have me on the carpet before I could get to bed to-night I wouldn't have done it. Serves me right."

The Colonel's stare silently condemned this flippancy.

"Then," he rejoined very coldly, handing him a copy of the "Gorchester Bulletin," "I conclude that you have not seen this?"

Philip took the paper, saw the head-lines, read the first few paragraphs beneath them. The Chief's gimlet eyes, never leaving his face, saw the first irrepressible start of consternation, of deep annoyance. It was succeeded by an ironic shrug.



“ Really this makes me feel like Eugene Aram :

A mighty wind had swept the leaves  
And still the corpse was bare ! ”

“ What can you tell us about this find ? ” broke in his questioner harshly, lifting the ruined suit-case from under the table at which he sat.

“ Well, it belongs to me, as you have doubtless surmised,” was the rejoinder. “ And I must own up. I threw that confounded thing into the river. The tide was running out at such a pace that I had every hope of losing it permanently. I calculated that the ebb would carry it along until it was completely water-logged and that the stones would then sink it. . . . But I assume, after the damning testimony of the little wallet, you set them to dredge . . . and there it is. Yes. I suppose you know the clothes ? ”

“ Mrs. Jenkins has identified them all except the collar and pullover. Are the latter yours ? ”

Philip shook his head, thrusting the damp suit-case away from him with his foot. “ No,” he said, as one in profound thought, “ they are not mine.”

Borrow struck the table lightly with his clenched hand. “ And you still maintain, in face of this blood-soaked clothing, in face of the blood which was found caked upon a rug that lay upon the floor of your mill, in face of the poor girl’s finger-marks, clutching the edge of your screen—you assert that Miss Varick, when she left you, was not only alive but uninjured ? ”

"That is so."

"Come, sir"—severely—"a girl may get her clothing splashed with blood, but she doesn't strip off her things and fly from the spot with nothing on. I suggest to you that you yourself took off her clothes when she was in no state to resist—with the intention of destroying incriminating evidence."

Philip stared at him for some moments in silence, while they all hung upon his next words. "I shall have to tell you, I suppose," he began at last, "what really did happen. They have only themselves to blame. I have done all I could to keep it dark, but I must draw the line when you talk as if you seriously suspected me of having murdered a woman. I shall make a clean breast of it, unless by this time to-morrow you know it all yourselves without my help, as I expect you almost certainly must."

"What do you mean by that? Why must we know to-morrow what we do not know to-day?"

"Because I am sure it can't be kept quiet any longer. In fact, unless there has been some fresh catastrophe of which I know nothing, I will guarantee to tell you all my own part in the affair by to-morrow afternoon." He pulled out his watch. "It's getting late for all of us. Will the company give me leave and let me have a free hand for the next eighteen hours? I mean without any police spy dogging me——"

Borrow regarded him with grave displeasure.

"Really, Professor Armitage, I hardly think you can be serious. To put the thing plainly, you are



suspected of murder. And you—knowing as you now know what strong evidence there is against you—you have the temerity to ask to be allowed to make your escape unhindered——”

“Escape be —— Excuse me, Colonel, but I must protest. Nobody suspects me of murder—that is, nobody who knows me. Everybody here except yourself must realize that you have got hold of a mare’s nest. I may add that if this charge is carried any further you will find yourself in a day or two looking extremely foolish. I have told my friends here—in confidence—the one essential thing, namely, that as far as I know Miss Varick is quite safe. But there is some curious mystery hanging over the affair and it must be solved. I am certain that Varick and Dalton will make themselves responsible for me until, let us say, tea-time to-morrow.”

Professor Varick spoke up, firmly and clearly. “Let us understand, Philip, what it is that you ask. You want twenty-four hours delay before telling us the entire extent of what you know?”

“Yes, sir. I do not want all that time for investigation, but I have my professional duties to get through. I have two lectures to-morrow morning, and private tuition from three till four. If a message is sent to the Principal that the Chief here has put me in quod, I shall be in a very uncomfortable position.”

“But you assure us that you have reasonable expectation of having fresh information to lay before us to-morrow?”

“I am fairly positive about that. Of course, if

anything has happened to the missing two since I saw them, I may be in the soup, having been left by them to do their dirty work for them. But in my opinion the bottom must fall out of the mystery in course of to-morrow."

"Now, Colonel Borrow," said Professor Varick in his precise, dignified way. "This investigation, at my earnest request, has been kept private but for the unlucky exposure in yesterday's Press. This inquiry is being held at my instigation. I am Miss Varick's next of kin, and the matter is therefore in my hands. It is my wish that no further move be made until to-morrow afternoon. I hereby inform you that I assume all responsibility, and that I request you to set Mr. Armitage at liberty at once, on the understanding that I am surety for him that he will not go away, but will abide any further examination to which it may be necessary to subject him. I think and hope that Mrs. Gray has sufficient confidence in my judgment to associate herself with my wife and myself in this matter."

The Colonel looked more than dubious. "I fear you are very imprudent, Professor Varick."

"I think not. I am so sure of my ground that I am prepared to offer financial surety ; but, as Philip has not been arrested, I gather that there can be no question of bail ? "

Borrow looked sour. "Had he been arrested there would likewise have been no question of bail," he replied drily. "No bail is permissible in respect of a murder charge."



"Then I am thankful we kept it in our own hands, and in yours, Chief Constable. I trust Philip Armitage completely."

"You have reflected that this is the ninth day since Miss Varick disappeared? Were the story Mr. Armitage wishes us to believe a true story, can you suggest any reason at all why you have been left without any message from the runaways all this time?"

"That's the crux of the affair," replied Philip, "of course. But to-morrow is the tenth day, and to-morrow, even if there is no news, yet there must be a new factor introduced into the situation. I shall no longer have to carry the whole brunt of it."

The Chief was evidently profoundly dissatisfied. "Do I understand," he asked of Professor Varick, "that you wish us to retire from the affair altogether?"

"It is difficult to give a definite reply to that, Colonel. Needless to say we are most grateful for what you have already done for us. But I gather from what Philip says that he considers this not to be a case for police intervention—is that not so, Philip?"

Armitage rose, strolled across the room and leaned his back against the mantelpiece. It was a favourite position of his when in cogitation but, to the Chief Constable, there was an unfitting familiarity about it. "Well," he said at last, "I know right well that in this case publicity is the one thing that isn't likely to be forgiven; there'll be a most unholy row if names get into the papers. On the other hand, what are we to do? The Chief has every reason to be suspicious of me, as also has poor young Ord, who

blundered almost into the middle of things. I see that it all looks most abominably fishy. I am myself completely at a loss to understand this—this silence. If I can't get at the bottom of it by to-morrow afternoon, then we may have to put on the hounds full cry." . . . He paused and shook his great shoulders impatiently. "But I can't believe it. I think I must get some facts by to-morrow. Now let us see. . . . Colonel Borrow is still inclined to believe that I mean to bolt. Can we do anything about that? To alleviate his fears I mean? Dalton, will you give me a shake-down for the night, so as not to let me out of your sight? Lock me in my room if you like; I'm quite willing."

Dalton nodded at once. "My wife's away. You can have the empty bed in my room," he said with ready goodwill.

"Excellent! Let us be off then. Mrs. Varick looks ready to drop with fatigue." He went up to the old lady, who, having been travelling all day long, was indeed at the extreme limit of endurance. "Come, dear Aunt Sophy," he said affectionately, addressing her by the name Irma used, and which he knew she liked to hear from him. He passed his big arm around her and raised her deftly to her feet. "Please God, your minx is all right," he consoled her, "and we'll try to get hold of some news about her to-morrow morning."

Borrow could see that all the party except himself were quite convinced of the young man's good faith; yet he himself was nothing of the kind. He could



not feel that Philip's demeanour was the correct one for injured innocence. "He is clever—very clever," he thought; and was half inclined to have him secretly watched, unknown to the Varicks or the College authorities.

"Good night," said Armitage to him good-humouredly, as he paused to allow old Mrs. Varick to shake hands with the Chief Constable and murmur thanks. "Perhaps by to-morrow afternoon you may feel able to shake hands with me. I'm of a forgiving nature, so I shall be ready on my side, though I don't forget that I may yet have to take proceedings against you for searching my premises without a warrant. High-handed measures, sir! You ought to have questioned me first."

The Chief Constable's frown was dark. This was a flick on the raw. As a fact, he had been so convinced of finding definite proof up at the mill of the young professor's guilt that he had risked exceeding his own powers, and the result had not justified him.

As his visitors passed down the concrete staircase to the waiting cars, the young sergeant who had fetched Philip from his rooms was standing at the open door. He received a mischievous grin as Philip passed out with old Mrs. Varick clinging tenderly to his arm.

"Good thing, after all, that I told Mrs. Dicks to leave the door on the latch, wasn't it?" said the suspected man wickedly.

## CHAPTER XXV THE SECOND DISAPPEARANCE

"THE first thing for me to do," remarked Armitage, emerging from the Dalton's dining-room next morning after a hearty breakfast, "is to use your telephone, please. I want to ring up——" He broke off suddenly, on his way to the telephone, which stood round the corner of the elbow-shaped hall. On a chair near the street door was seated a meek and drooping figure.

"Why, Pratt!" he said. "What luck! You are the very man I want to interview!"

It was indeed the Motor Spirit; in other words, Dr. Strom's factotum. With a look of relief he rose to his feet, holding his bowler hat before him like a shield.

"Ah, yes," said Dalton. "I had almost forgotten you were there, Pratt. They told me you wanted to see me—a message from your master I expect—got back safely—eh?"

"That's just it, sir, he hasn't got back, and I thought it possible you might have heard from him," said Pratt in a voice as nearly expressionless as he could make it, but which did not wholly conceal an underlying anxiety.

"Not got back yet? When's he coming?" burst out Philip eagerly.

"He's not coming at all, sir, what I can see of it——"

"Heavens man, not bad news?" cried Dalton in stupefaction.



"No, sir, not bad *news* ; not *bad* news," faltered the Motor Spirit, "just no news at all, sir. I thought he might have written to you, so I slipped round here before going on to speak to the Principal. In fact, sir, Mr. Benwell asked me to come."

"Mr. Benwell?" echoed Dalton blankly. "Who's he?"

"I understand he's the gentleman who's to *deputize*—that is"—with an annoyed consciousness of not having got the word right—"who's to do Dr. Strom's work for him while he's away."

Dalton stared. This was all news to him. Looking at Armitage he caught an expression which seemed to say, "I told you so."

"Come this way, Pratt," said the master of the house, going towards his study, followed by Armitage. "Now," he continued, when they were shut in, "we can thrash this out. Sit down, man, and tell us what has happened, please, as far as you know it."

"Well, sir, you are doubtless aware that the Doctor went off, last Friday was a week, to Lisbon, to some great conference there."

"Quite. We know that. Go on."

"Well, sir, he gave me leave off for the week. I was to be sure and get back the following Friday night, to put the house in order against his return. So I went off, sir, early Saturday morning to my married sister at Weston, and when I got back on Friday night there was a letter lay in the letter-box, addressed to Dr. Strom's butler. I opened it, and it was from

## THE SECOND DISAPPEARANCE

this Mr. Benwell, who wrote from Sheffield saying that in accordance with Dr. Stom's predictions he would be arriving on Sunday at his residence here. He added a few lines saying he would wish for supper and was a bit puzzled, but I felt pretty sure I should show the master to confirm, so I got ready and ordered in food. All Saturday I waited to hear, but no letter came. I stayed yesterday waiting about, and at dinner-time Benwell arrived. I was a bit uncomfortable, still having been told to expect him, because, as you know, our house is full of valuable things, and it did seem so odd not to have heard a word; I didn't know what to make of it. However, I didn't see what I could do about it, only I thought to myself that I would keep my eyes skinned; and when he came he was such a little bit of a chap—beg pardon, sir—but I knew I could tackle him easy if need arose. I went up while he was having his dinner, and unpacked his things for him, making sure he had no firearms or such; and I took the precaution of sleeping downstairs in a little room just off the hall, so that if he tried to decamp in the night I should be on to him. . . .”

“Got that letter on you, Pratt?” asked Armitage abruptly.

The Motor Spirit at once produced a letter written upon Sheffield University paper, in an extremely scholarly hand. There was a note enclosed, addressed to Strom himself, to be forwarded.



## THE MISSING TWO

n's genuine enough," said Armie thought-  
do you say, Dalton ; shall we open

nd at once to Strom's place and  
himself," said Dalton. "Also we  
the Principal, ought we not ? "

y grateful if you would, sir," said Pratt.  
dly know what to say, myself. You see,  
thing's puzzling me, more than a little.  
m went off in his car last week, driving himself,  
ne was to let me know where he was leaving it, so  
at I could go and fetch it back. But I haven't had  
so much as a post card, and I don't know where to  
go——"

"Well, I can help a bit there, I think," remarked  
Dalton, putting on his glasses and beginning to search  
the papers on an extremely untidy side-table. "The  
whole conference was going over by the same boat,  
and I have a notice of its name somewhere, with the  
port of departure and so on——"

"You'll excuse me, sir, but Dr. Strom was not  
travelling on that boat at all. Lord Arras had lent  
him his big steam yacht—you know how fond the  
master is of cruising. He was going, he said, with a  
very small party, and he was looking forward to it  
just like a boy, sir. I know he was sending stores  
and so on aboard. He had sailed on that yacht before  
—in fact, I was with him on that cruise—and he  
thought very highly of the skipper——"

"What is she called ? The yacht, I mean ? "

"His lordship calls her 'Tapestry,' in allusion to

his own title, so Dr. Strom informed me."

"Do you know where she was lying?"

"At Weymouth, I am almost sure. At least, she was there the week before."

Dalton looked at Armitage—a curious look. "This is what you expected?"

"More or less."

"Strom is—er—the man?"

"Strom is the man."

Pratt looked uneasily from one to the other. "You don't think anything's happened to him?" he faltered, growing pale. "That was an awful gale last week, wasn't it? But there's been nothing in the papers about any yacht being lost——"

"We will have inquiries made," said Dalton gravely. "And we can, I expect, trace the car easily enough if it's in a Weymouth garage——"

"But I couldn't take it out, could I? Not without the Dr. sent me his receipt for it?"

"No, I suppose not," replied Philip broodingly. "I think the first thing I had better do is to send a cable to Lisbon. We must ascertain whether Strom actually got there." He glanced at Dalton. "Your friend Streeter is there, is he not?"

"He was—but the conference has broken up by now——"

"By Jove, yes, I suppose so."

"Wait a bit—wait a bit," said Dalton, holding his hand to his head. "What did Streeter tell me? He was going to stay with friends, not at the hotel where the members of the conference were lodged. He was



to be there until some time this week, and he gave me his address in case I was able to send him some measurements which the astronomers out there were anxious to have. Unluckily I couldn't get 'em ; but here's the address."

Armitage copied it eagerly. " Well, here goes ! I must pre-pay the reply. "*Is Strom in Lisbon?* will be enough, won't it ? "

" I don't see what else you can say. You don't want to mention——"

" No, certainly not ! "

" Well, if he is there we shall at least know that the yacht didn't go down in that storm, because it must have been all over before she reached Portugal, I think."

They promised Pratt that they would ring him up the moment the reply to the cablegram came through. Then they separated, Dalton to see the Principal, Armitage to dispatch the message and hasten on thence to his lecture.

The two met in the middle of the morning, between lectures, to gulp a cup of coffee and to compare notes.

" The whole thing," Dalton informed Armitage, " is curiouser and curiouser. The Principal is completely puzzled. He tells me that Strom approached him at the beginning of term on the subject of taking a couple of months furlough, with a view to pursuing some archæological researches in Africa. Said he thought it might be a wise plan to make his travels coincide with his voyage to Lisbon, as he had the loan of

Arras's yacht. After discussion, the Principal agreed, on condition that Strom would charge himself with the duty of securing and, incidentally, renumerating an adequate substitute to carry on while he was away. Granville was willing to deputize for a week, but has too much work of his own to make it practicable that he should do so for a whole term. Strom said he would see what he could do about it, and later—a week or so later—told the Principal that he hoped he had secured Benwell, a first-rate man who would he felt sure prove acceptable. Since then the subject had not again been mentioned between them, and as Strom departed, leaving the whole scheme in the air, the Principal assumed that he had abandoned the idea and was coming home to resume his work this week."

"And you told him that Strom had neither turned up nor written?"

"Yes; and moreover, that Benwell had actually arrived and was installed in his rooms. On that, he at once rang up and begged Benwell to come and interview him, apologizing for his own apparent remissness, and saying that he supposed some letter from Strom to himself must have gone astray."

"Yes," said Armie thoughtfully. "I should be inclined myself to put down the whole thing to a letter having gone astray; but it does not seem to me likely that four or five letters should *all* have gone astray, addressed to different people, and posted, one assumes, in different places and at different times. Irma Varick must have written to Miss Hawke, one



would conclude—also to the Jenkinses, also possibly to her uncle and aunt at Evian ; and Strom would have sent word to the Principal and also to Pratt, if to nobody else.”

Dalton agreed, with a puzzled frown. “ Well, if we catch Streeter and get an answer to our cable we shall feel less anxiety about—about the girl. You feel sure she is with him ? ”

“ I can only tell you that she left me in his company, and she took her luggage with her.”

Dalton shook his head. “ Well, I confess I should not have expected it, either of him or of her. Not even in these days. . . . I own that it has given me a shock.”

“ What, that Irma should go yachting with Dr. Strom ? But why not ? He is a potent, grave and reverend member of his University, and the only thing that comes as a surprise to us is that he has been such a friend of hers, or of any girl’s, as to invite her to go on a cruise. I may point out that they are hardly likely to be alone together on that great yacht. For all we know to the contrary, Arras may be there too, with a party. I wouldn’t start grieving about chaperons, if I were you. Miss Varick is, in my opinion quite capable of looking after herself. . . . And now I must bolt. With luck we ought to get our cable before long.”

In fact, the cablegram arrived about two o’clock and was handed to Armitage by Groggs as he came out from lunch. Dalton stood beside him, a-twitter with eagerness as he opened it :

Strom left here Thursday stop s.y. Tapestry stop  
Destination unknown.

“So that’s that,” said Philip, re-folding the message and placing it in his pocket. “So far, so good. Now, please, Dalton, not a word of this to anybody until after we meet at four o’clock. Say nothing of Strom’s non-appearance, nothing of the steps we have taken, not even to Mrs. Gray or the Varicks. Because if you do”—wagging a minatory forefinger—“they will tell Borrow and we shall have him sending for Pratt to identify the collar and pullover, and I don’t wish that to happen until I have told my story.” He smiled crookedly. “That was a nasty dig I gave Borrow about searching my place without authorization, wasn’t it? All very fine, you know, but if I hadn’t been such a blameless lad, I should be in gaol at this moment; and what hope is there for any College professor if he’s once been behind the bars? Being innocent wouldn’t amount to a row of pins! He’d simply be dead—and buried!”

## CHAPTER XXVI WHAT PHILIP TOLD DILYS

DILYS PENDERED opened her eyes that Monday morning to face such a problem as she had never thought could be hers.

Yesterday’s final shock—the finding of the terrible



evidence against Armitage—had torn away from her the last veil. She was deeply in love with a man who was, it seemed, a murderer, if not . . . if not *worse*.

She was herself amazed at the state of her own feeling, the pain at her heart when she thought of Philip. The touch of his big, warm hand as he had taken hers when Garrie broke in upon them on Saturday, and the look in his eyes which accompanied that magnetic touch were both almost unbearably sweet and troubling.

She had thought this man was Irma's lover. In fact, she was sure that he had been. He was so no longer. He was her lover—hers. On Saturday she had beaten back with terror and shame Garrie's suggestion that Philip was making love to her in order to have her on his side—to avert a danger. Now, she simply knew that the suggestion was not true.

He loved her, and he was guilty. Not merely so, but he was a hardened liar. He had lied to Garrie, that she knew. Somehow she had not thought that he would lie to her. Yet she could hardly resist the conclusion of his having done so.

He had told her definitely on Friday that to the best of his knowledge and belief Irma was well and safe. . . . *Could* there be an explanation? A way out? Some method of cleansing the defaced image of the lover who must, to satisfy her, be also the perfect knight?

As she arose, as she said her prayers and pleaded not to be led into temptation, she was wondering how

much she could stand, how far she could resist. To her humiliation, she had to admit in her honesty of heart, that if Philip were to kiss her, she did not know what might happen! . . . But he *could* not kiss her—not in a great empty room with glass swing-doors. . . .

Shame upon her! Was that the only source of her security? Had she no inner strength, no pride? . . . Oh, but he had so *wanted* to kiss her on Saturday, just when Garrie came storming in! Dear Garrie! Just in time!

What would the other girls, chattering like pies all down the long breakfast-table, think if they could see into Dil's heart? Dil whom they all thought so proper—Dil who held her head so high? Nasty, contemptible, fleshly—she used that abominable word to scourge herself withal!

On her plate lay a note in Armie's handwriting.

Her heart began to beat in long, slow throbs, and there was a mist before her eyes. For a few moments she could not see the bread-dish, and felt that her disorder must be obvious to everybody present. It seemed like a miracle that nobody took any particular notice of her. There was a hockey match between the Kittery and Meltenham College that afternoon and they were immersed in the topic to the exclusion of all else.

By the time that Baynes came round to offer her the alternative of eggs or bacon, she was able to answer rationally.

There was a letter from home also, and she opened



that first, so as to hide the envelope beneath, reading it slowly as she ate. Not until she had finished her meal, risen from the table and gone to her study to fetch her books did she tear with shaking fingers the cover of the first letter ever addressed to her by any young man except her Cousin Garrie.

BLESSED DAMOSEL, [she read,]

Can you make it 2.45 this afternoon instead of 3 as there is an appointment I have to keep at 4 p.m. and I don't want to cut our lesson short?

Shall assume consent unless you let me know otherwise.  
All my homage

PHILIP D. A.

With a tender smile—but a moment later she called it in fury a fatuous smile—she slipped this back into the envelope. There was a little locked tin box in her desk and she drew out the key, put in the letter and fastened it secure from prying eyes.

There was nothing that could provoke unfavourable comment in the document—yet it produced the effect of his having caressed her. Dizzily she wavered a moment on the edge of her pitfall. Should she cancel her lesson? The suggested alteration of time gave her a loophole. Should she say she could not manage 2.45? “He knows I may have seen the story in yesterday's paper. He thinks I may be wanting to wriggle out.” . . . No! She was bothered if she would do that! If he was ready to give the lesson, she was ready to receive it.

With all due calmness she put on her coat and went

off down to the tram in her usual neat shabbiness, only saying to herself that she should be seeing him a quarter of an hour sooner than she had expected.

Down at the College buildings students were clustered in knots and busily talking. Of course ! Some of them must have seen that awful paper. There was nothing much except the initials to suggest any spiciness of scandal, any breath blowing upon the sacred Academic enclosure. If any of the students twigged those initials as belonging to Armie, he would be ragged about it—nobody would take it seriously.

Sure enough, there he was ; she saw him in the distance. They were shouting to him.

“ Been leaving your luggage about, Professor ? Been lending it to a lady ? Seen this stuff in the ‘ Bulletin ’ ? ”

He was taking it quite lightly—explaining that he had not seen the story until quite late at night, when it was shown to him by friends. He caught Dilys’ eye as she hastened upstairs to her lecture, and nodded with a smile so calm, so confident, that she was all the more completely bewildered by his inconsistencies.

For some reason she could not quite explain to herself she took pains not to encounter Garrie, going home to the Kittery to lunch. He rang her up while she was there, however, to ask if she had time to go out with him at four. She replied in the negative. She could not go out as she had to go straight from her lesson up to Parry, to arrange about her altered work and time-tables. Apparently her self-constituted guardian was appeased by the knowledge that



she would certainly not be with Armitage, and he let it go at that.

Feeling like "The Girl who took the Wrong Turning," or something equally lurid, Dil arrayed herself in her green frock after lunch, and made her way to the appointed place of meeting, which she took care to reach exactly at a quarter to three.

Punctual though she was, her tutor had been a minute sooner ; she was not, however, aware of this until she had entered, and the door had swung to behind her, for the reason that the large screens which were provided to exclude draughts had been unfolded and placed before the entrance.

This made the room much more comfortable, but prevented the passer-by in the corridor from seeing who was within.

Dil was nervously self-conscious as she came forward ; but her expression was aloof, and she bowed almost stiffly as she laid down her books and went to deposit her hat and coat on the extreme end of the long table.

Her heart was beating so loud as she came back to the chair he had set for her at his side that she feared he might hear it. All was so silent. The vast building was empty with the emptiness of Monday, accentuated that day by the circumstance of the girls hockey match with Meltenham.

She was as much alone with him as she had been in the twilight garden at Carsdon.

He betrayed no consciousness of the fact. His mouth was puckered in an almost silent whistle, and

he was turning over the leaves of a text-book with preoccupation. The written work she had done for him lay beside him, and she saw a great deal of blue pencilling.

In fact, he proceeded to give her a pretty complete dressing-down. He did not entirely discourage her—called it a “plucky attempt,” but had seemingly expected more.

She accepted criticism frankly and without either pique or any sign of despair. Evidently she understood the exact meaning of his censure, and readily agreed that they had better go back and retrace some of the ground they had covered on Saturday.

For nearly half an hour they did so, until Dil had lost her self-consciousness and settled down once more in the old comfortable relationship of master and pupil.

“Capital!” he said at last, leaning back in his chair with his arms behind his head. “That’s good. You’ve got the hang of it this time, all right. And now”—the hands came unclasped and were laid on the table before him—“now I have something to say to you which is rather important—something which has nothing to do with this work——”

“Is it necessary?” asked Dil in a hard voice, studying the point of her pencil with much care.

“Yes, it’s necessary from my point of view. May I recall to you the fact that I never spoke a word to you about the Irma affair? It was you who deliberately attacked me on the point, was it not?”

Dil had to own that frankly.



"Very well. I declined to discuss it then—too many facts and persons were involved ; but you will admit that I promised to tell you more as soon as I felt myself free to do so. May I ask whether you saw or were told of a paragraph which appeared in a midday edition of the ' Bulletin ' yesterday, about the taking out of the water of a suit-case with my initials, full of bloodstained clothes ? "

" I saw it." Her voice was barely audible.

" And you said, ' Now he is unmasked for the liar and murderer he is,' didn't you ? "

" It made me very unhappy."

" Unhappy ? Because of the supposed fate of Irma, your friend ? "

" Not only that."

" Dilys, was it partly that you were sorry for the loss of another friend, for the shattering of illusion about—about me ? "

" Yes, it was," she replied bravely. " I keep on saying to myself that I don't believe you capable of these things. Then comes another horrible piece of testimony against you, and I don't know what to think, but I still say to myself, ' No. He couldn't—he *couldn't*' . . . and then comes yesterday——"

" And your Couéism, however plucky, breaks down at last ? "

There was a long pause and then she whispered, " It—it hasn't broken down yet—not finally."

He leaned his elbows on the table and covered his face. " Oh, Angel of the Flaming Sword," he said, " I dare not meet your accusing eyes—they are like

the blade that turned every way. They pierce me through and through. Don't look at me, look anywhere else—up, down—only not at me, because I can't stand it. . . . To go back to the nineteenth century, you are to me 'as is the conscience of a saint among his warring senses' to a knight."

Turning towards her for a moment, he took both her hands, lifted them from her lap to the table, and folded them one over the other. "Look at your hands and listen," said he. "Perhaps what I am going to say will only make you despise me more. I am the agelong Adam and I am going to say 'The woman tempted me.' Perhaps no man should ever say that, however true he may think it. But I want you to have the truth about Irma Varick and me. I suppose I piqued her. She is accustomed to triumphing without an effort. I went on my way untroubled and she set herself to trouble me. I'm totally inexperienced in sex affairs, I know very little of women; and when she deliberately set herself to ensnare me, I was swept off my feet. She plunged me in that horrible agitation of the senses which most people mistake for love, I fancy. She kept me always on tenterhooks; she never promised anything, but she gave enough to keep me tied to her. If I swore that that was the very end and let her alone for a few days; she beckoned afresh, she lured me back. I thought it was all just her way of enjoying life—the exhibition of her power; but presently I guessed at something more than that, something sinister. . . . I couldn't resist the conclusion that she was using



me for some other purpose, which I could not fathom. Are you listening, oh, Flaming Minister of Grace?"

"Yes," she replied in a still voice, "I am listening."

"God bless you! You understand—you know instinctively what I mean," he muttered. "Well, the time came when I felt the thing must stop. I was losing my mental balance, falling into a state of complete distraction, my grip on life and my work was growing erratic, and I decided that I must formulate an ultimatum. Things were in that state last Sunday fortnight—yesterday fortnight—when I understood that Irma was spending the week-end at Ivy-bridge in Devon with her aunt, Miss Bond."

"Yes, we all thought so," murmured Dilys. She was by now too absorbed in the story to think of trying to stop him.

"I was feeling fearfully restless, and I telephoned to some old friends, the Blighs, at Weymouth, saying I would drive over and see them. I set out on Saturday, the moment I was free from work, slept at an inn on the road and got to Weymouth about eleven next day. I garaged my car at the Cornwood Hotel, where I usually go; and as I came from the yard on foot, round the side of the hotel, towards the front, I saw Claud Strom standing at the door of his car, as though he had just put something into it. He turned immediately and went back into the hotel, and I wondered who was with him in his car, for he was speaking to somebody when I first recognized him; he was smiling and looking more natural than I have ever seen him, in a lounge suit, light grey.

I never saw him wearing light-coloured things before that I remember. . . .

"I had the curiosity to go out into the road, which I crossed, pausing to go into a tobacconist's opposite for matches. I had crossed behind the car, which was closed, so that its occupant could not have seen me. I bought a paper at the tobacconist's and opened it, standing just within the shop ; and I watched. I had only a minute to wait, when Strom came back, carrying a bag and accompanied by a servant who had a suit-case. The man was tipped, the things were put in behind, and Strom, taking the driver's seat, started the car and turned it round in the wide road. As it turned, the other side of it was visible to me, and I saw that his companion was Miss Varick."

"You are sure ?"

"I am quite sure. Well, it looked bad, to me. It is all very well for people to go about together, but it seemed quite plain that those two had been staying at the Cornwood the previous night, she having given out that she was visiting at Ivybridge.

"All that week I kept on trying to corner Irma and get the truth out of her. My infatuation was of the kind to cool rapidly on discovering that she had been making me her stalking-horse. At last I forced from her the fact that she would be away again the following week-end, and was going off—so she told me—on Saturday morning early."

"I went and fetched her on Friday evening and drove her up with me to Welwych, so that I could have it out with her. She was very angry and stubborn



and came most reluctantly, but I had lost my temper badly, and I thought I had a right to insist. She said she would not go into the mill, and I said she should. I said if she could go and stay in an hotel with Strom she could give me ten minutes' explanation. So she came upstairs, on a promise from me that she should leave as soon as she had told me the truth ; and what she told me was what I might have guessed—that she had been married to Strom the previous Saturday, but that he was most anxious for the secret to be kept until they were off ; he is absurdly sensitive and thought he would be chaffed unmercifully upon his surrender to matrimony, so he wanted it kept quiet until they had started on their honeymoon, which they were doing almost at once. He was to pick her up with her luggage—which I had on board—at a cottage belonging to an old nurse of his, which they had lately used as their rendezvous. The arrangement had been that she was to drive that far in a taxi, only she was using my car instead ; and she was in a fearful hurry to be gone, so that she should get there first and Claud should not know that it was I who had brought her.

“ I own that I went off the deep end a bit, for I was furious. But I had hardly time to begin before a car stopped at the mill gate, some one ran up the steps and in burst Strom himself. I have seen a good many men angry, but never one I think in such a towering passion as he was. It is not too much to say that he was livid with rage.”

"HOW Strom had discovered where Irma was," continued Philip, "I do not know; but I fancy that he must have rung up Houston Square to ascertain whether she had started. As we know, they were all out, so he would have got no answer, and would naturally proceed to the rendezvous at the nurse's cottage, only to find that she had not yet arrived. He knew the gossip about myself and her which was going the rounds. I know he was jealous of me, because he was always so uncivil when we met. He had, as it happened, heard me say that I was going up to the telescope that night, and in an access of jealousy I believe he decided to come round to the mill just to make sure there was nothing in it. I am convinced that he did not seriously expect to find us there together. It was a shock, and he simply went berserk. . . ."

The narrator paused to take out a handkerchief, which he passed over his forehead.

"Was—was Irma afraid of him?" timidly inquired Dilys.

"I think she was, though she stood up to him—even arrogantly. I won't repeat the things he said to her, but if I had been in her place I should have found them hard to forgive. Like a fool I put in my oar, telling him to keep his mouth shut, at least until he was off my premises; and that turned his insensate fury on me. He hit me without warning—socked me on the jaw when I was all unprepared, and that



was more than I could stand. Remember, I was already at boiling-point, and I went for him professionally. In less time than it takes to tell I had laid him out, and he was down on the floor, with the blood streaming from his aristocratic nose.

“Down went Irma on her knees beside him, lifted his head into her lap, and before I could find any rags or towels he had bled like a pig upon her light frock. (I should say that she had taken off her coat when I brought her into the mill). It was several minutes before he came round, and by that time her clothes were in a horrible state.

“When at last he opened his eyes, I think he was a trifle ashamed of himself. He looked up into her face, and it was set like a flint. He could see that he was deeply in disgrace with her. He was desperately anxious to be gone, and he struggled to get up, which brought on the bleeding afresh. I had to help him to his feet and I took him behind the screens and made him lie down on the bed while I went downstairs for pails of water. Irma left him to me, while she herself went out to the car and brought in one of her suitcases. Presently he was able to sit on the bed, with my basin on his knees and by degrees I made him fairly neat, but his collar and tie were in a hopeless state and so was the front of the pullover thing he was wearing. I volunteered to go and fetch some of his luggage so that he could change, and he accepted my offer with a muttered something that might have been meant for an apology.

“When he was ready, I helped him to an arm-chair,

and gave him a drink of whisky, while Irma went behind the screens and changed. The whisky helped to pull him round, and by the time Irma reappeared he was fairly collected. I own that my animus against him had evaporated wonderfully after I had punished him ; in fact, I think my sympathies were with him by that time, when I saw how deeply he had offended his bride.

“ She brought out the discarded raiment—his and hers—rolled together, and asked me to destroy it. She said she felt it impossible to send it to a cleaner’s without some kind of explanation, and it would be quicker and more sanitary to burn it. Like an ass, I promised, for I could see that Strom was mad to be gone, and I own that I was just as anxious to be rid of them. They both entreated me to say nothing to anybody of their visit ; and at the moment that seemed so obviously the best course that I agreed. Then Irma shook hands with me, and begged my pardon—‘ not only on her own account, but on her husband’s ’—speaking very distinctly so that he must hear what she said. His head was still so dizzy that I had to help him down the ladder ; and it was Irma who took her place at the steering-wheel, being far the more self-possessed of the two. I think she was in two minds as to whether to go with him or not, but I suppose she hardly knew what else to do. So they drove off and I was left to dash upstairs and set to work to remove from my sitting-room all traces of their presence, which I was most anxious to do, because I felt fairly sure that one or two people would be visiting



the mill that night. It was a nasty job, mopping up blood off the floor, emptying basins, sluicing the drain and so on. Fortunately I had an old battered paste-board suit-case in a cupboard, and into it I stuffed the soiled clothes. I worked like a nigger, and by the time the place began to look more or less normal I realized that I was myself feeling a bit groggy, for he had hit me hard and my head was humming. I have no hearth up at Welwych—an oil-stove is my only way of warming the place—so I thought I had better drive to some lonely spot and get rid of the traces of crime ; and then I remembered the flood-tide and how it would be racing just then, and it seemed a providential way of losing the beastly suit-case. I carried it downstairs and flung it on to my car, then drew two great brimming pails of water and carried them into the wood. In one of them I rinsed my gory hands and arms. The other was intended to bathe my sore head withal, but the clay was slippery. I had poured away the water from pail one, and I must needs—my sight being a bit blurred I fancy, crashing about there in the dark—slip up in the mire and come down with my head on the rim of pail two, making myself in a worse mess than ever. That fall shook me up so badly that I sat down on the step, with my head inside the car and for a while I was dead to the world.

“ I must, I think, have lost consciousness or slept for about twenty minutes ; for when I came to, Garrie Ord was just starting up his car at the mill gates ; and from what you have since told me, he

must have arrived on the scene at least a quarter of an hour before that, and been upstairs, poking about.

" . . . Well, well ! I have not, as I see things, been free to tell you all this until to-day. But to-day I am free, because the fact that Strom is missing became known this morning."

Dilys raised her eyes. " Missing ? " she queried, as if puzzled.

It was only one word. But the difference in its intonation was like a draught of fresh air to Philip. Without asking, he knew at once that she was accepting his story as true. Her doubt had disappeared. A light kindled in his eyes and he challenged her look with his arm.

" The sword is sheathed," he murmured. " Thank God for that ! "

Dilys turned away. She made a little movement with her hands as if she begged him to be reticent. " I believe all you have said," she murmured hastily, " and it was good of you to tell me——"

" It was not good of me at all, but I must let you know why I told you. It was because, at four o'clock, I am going on to tell them all, the Varicks, Mrs. Gray, Miss Hawke and Colonel Borrow, a version of what you have just heard. It was your right to know first. This morning I cabled to Lisbon, to ascertain whether the Stroms had got there. I was told that the yacht left Lisbon on Thursday with them on board ; so they are safe so far ; but nothing explains the fact that they have kept everyone in the dark as regards their movements."



"No. That is still a mystery. I can't understand it."

Philip looked at his watch. "Got ten minutes more," he said, "and an important point to settle. Now that you know what happened at Welwych Mill—now that you know the despicable kind of fellow I am—succumbing to an infatuation for the first good-looking girl who seriously tried to put the 'Come-hither' on me—what about it? Will you still be too busy to lend me any of your leisure? Or can we be friends and try to know each other better?"

Dilys drew a long breath. "You know," said she, proud of being able to reply with composure, "that my whole future depends upon my making good—upon my getting this scholarship at Christmas. I—I—do you mind if I say that I find you a singularly—er—disturbing person? You mustn't interfere with my work. . . ."

"Now, Dilys"—he held up her book, with its blue criticisms as if to reproach her—"can you justly say that I disturb you? Could you have got on as far as this as easily, as quickly, without me?"

"No," she said with one of her slight swift smiles, "but then I only see you in lesson-time. I am used to you as a tutor——"

She broke off in a flurry because she felt this was rash, and he pounced upon it at once. "But not used to me as a . . . friend? Well, obviously, if custom—'use and wont'—is all we need, the sooner you start in to grow used to me in playtime, the better for your work. See, I am determined to act as your

trainer. As I dare say you know, the man who is training an athlete or—or a racehorse, has to supervise his pupil's entire time, and the pupil must do as he—or she—is told. If you will accept the situation and lay the responsibility on me, I'll see that you are so calm and unflurried, so fit and so well-prepared, that you simply can't fail——”

“I have thought,” she said softly, “that you are a bit of a tyrant—and you won't find that you get the best out of me by tyrannizing, so I warn you. My soul must be my own, please——”

“Your soul!” he said under his breath. “You'll always be captain of that, won't you just? I only ask you to leave room for me in it! Now, before we part—before I go on to talk to these excellent persons, this ex-official jury that is to try me—just give me your hand and say, ‘Philip, I trust you’.”

Dilys shook her head decisively, rising to her feet as she did so. “If you want me to cross all your ‘t's’ and dot all your ‘i's’ for you, we shan't get on together one bit. I won't be mawkish, and neither shall you, so don't expect it. I shall say nothing of the kind, but I will just own that I feel a good deal lighter-hearted than I did when I came into this room this afternoon.”

His eyes twinkled up at her mischievously. “You're as good as a cold shower-bath,” he remarked, “as refreshing and as elusive as water, O Nymph of the Dawn. Then shall we say Wednesday afternoon at 2.30? No lesson, but an expedition, on foot or in the car, as you please.”



"If I get on well enough with all the stuff that Parry is going to pile on my shoulders, yes to that," she replied. As she spoke she was at the far end of the long table, adjusting her cap and coat. She had already strapped her books together and she took them up, walking towards the door. When quite near it she stopped to add something, looking back at him over her shoulder. "I should like to drive out into the country and then have a walk, if that suits you—*Philip*."

She had slipped away before his reaction to this boldness could manifest itself, and was running rather too fast for dignity up the stone stairway on her way to Professor Parry's private room.

Armitage sat on for a minute after she had left him with a strange expression on his face. Then he shook his big shoulders and slowly rose, walking towards the door with the intention of folding back the screens.

As he was in the act of doing so, light steps ran along the corridor and Garrie Ord stopped at the entrance, then came in brusquely. "My cousin here?" he asked without cordiality.

"No, she had to go off up to Parry, to arrange her new hours," replied Philip cheerfully. "Help me with this unwieldy thing, there's a good chap. The draught this afternoon was enough to blow the horns off an ox, as the French say."

Garrie did as he was asked without speaking.

"Thanks," said Armie, when the screens were folded away. "By the way, Ord, shall you be seeing Miss Pendered to-day?"

"I shall try to," said Garrie briefly.

"Very well. Will you give her a message from me? Tell her that she is at liberty to tell you all that I have told her this afternoon. Don't forget. I must be off."

Garrie stood staring after him as he went out, with light step and buoyant air. He frowned, as he usually did when puzzled. What had old Armie been telling Dil? Was there fresh news?

He waited a long half-hour for the girl's appearance, hanging about the corridors and ragging Grogs at the entrance.

When she at last appeared he asked her eagerly, "I say, is there news? Armie says you are at liberty to tell me everything that he told you this afternoon."

"Oh, did he? Jolly of him," she smiled, thinking to herself that there would be reservations in her narrative. "I quite forgot to ask his leave, but I expect I should have had to tell you anyway. He has gone now to reveal all to the authorities in conclave, but he thought I ought to know, because, you see, I tackled him about the whole thing. At that time he didn't feel at liberty to speak, but now he does. So he told me, just now, after our lesson, all that happened that night at the mill."

"Come along, young woman. We'll make it 'Freddie's,'" said Garrie eagerly. "You look so bucked that I hope and trust what you've heard has made you feel able to respect the old chap again. Jove, I shall be glad if it has! This place hasn't



seemed the same to me since I felt obliged to wonder if old Armie was a wrong 'un. So come along."

"H'm! I meant to go and call upon the Miss Lovells, to tell them that I can't promise to take round any parish magazines this term. I simply shan't have time. Parry has loaded me up unmercifully. I think I shall have to ask Armie to tell him he's overdone it. I don't like to say so myself in case he thinks I'm lazy. But, you know, if they stuff me too full I shall fail; and I simply mustn't fail."

"Never mind the Miss Lovells. Come along and get a decent tea before plunging into work. You can scribble a note to them while we are feeding, and the *Pêche* and I will deliver it after I've driven you up to the Kittery."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE CHIEF CONSTABLE IS NOT SATISFIED

THERE was no doubt that the story which Professor Armitage related to the authorities made a considerable difference in their attitude to him. Blank astonishment is hardly a strong enough epithet to describe their feelings when they found themselves obliged to suspect the impeccable Dr. Strom of extremely disingenuous conduct, if of nothing worse.

Claud Strom, of all people! It seemed incredible.

Nobody had ever dreamed that Irma and he were more than barely acquainted. Mrs. Varick said they had met two or three times at their house ; but where the acquaintance had been developed since the Varicks departed from Gorchester remained an impenetrable mystery until the existence of the old nurse's cottage was revealed. Dalton and Armitage felt almost certain that Pratt knew nothing of his master's intentions—certainly not enough to make him suspicious.

Colonel Borrow offered to ascertain where the marriage had taken place, which, as the date was known and the place was most likely Weymouth, should not prove a matter of much difficulty. The Varicks felt that it would be a relief to their minds to have the fact verified. But everyone was left in the same befogged condition of wonder as to why the eloping pair had behaved as they had, and why they still allowed their friends and relatives to remain in doubt.

"Everyone at the conference must have known," cried Miss Hawke indignantly, "and we shall feel a good deal humiliated when the Miss Rorkes come back, and Dr. Selby, and tell us all that Dr. and Mrs. Strom said and did !"

"Dr. Selby will be home by Tuesday, I know," put in Professor Dalton, "because he is lecturing for me on Wednesday at the 'Uck.' I must make a note to ask him all about it, if we have not heard before then."

"I call it unpardonable," put in Mrs. Gray quietly. "Unpardonable of them both to grieve us so, to put



us to so much trouble—bringing Mr. and Mrs. Varick all this way, and involving them in the expense of a police inquiry. Why, it is only our great good-fortune in knowing Colonel Borrow personally which has enabled us to keep Irma's name and photo out of the papers ! ”

“ I think Professor Armitage should have spoken before,” was the Chief Constable's opinion ; but Dalton pointed out that it was easy to understand how loath Philip must have been to break his promise of secrecy, and how convinced he must have felt that each day would bring news.

“ I meant all along,” said Philip, “ to go to Mrs. Gray to-day, if the Stroms had not returned, and tell her everything. But when we interviewed Pratt this morning and found he was as much in the dark as we are, I was plunged into fresh uncertainty ; and I still do not know what to think. If the ‘ Tapestry ’ had gone down in the gale it would have explained things, but Streeter's wire seems to exclude that.”

The Varicks told Armitage that they were for the present remaining in Gorchester in hopes of news. They were removing the following day to Houston Square, to the rooms whence Irma had disappeared, and did not propose to return to Evian until the following week.

There seemed no other course but to await further news, which must be available before the week was out. The meeting broke up in a state of vague dissatisfaction. Professor Armitage seemed to be cleared ; but it was felt that his story was full of improbabilities.

Colonel Borrow, though he said nothing, was by no means convinced by it. So far, it all—that is to say, the story of what took place at the mill—rested upon Armitage's unsupported testimony ; for Strom's presence at Welwych that night there was not an iota of corroboration.

That Armitage would have concocted the whole of such a story was not likely. Some of it was doubtless true ; the point was—*how much* ? Had Strom indeed visited the mill in hopes of finding his wife there, and had he not found her ? With what story would Philip, granting that he had killed or injured the girl before Strom's arrival, have put him off ? Had he revealed a state of things between himself and Irma which had driven the newly-made husband off in despair and rage to board his yacht and be carried away from the tragedy of his betrayal ?

Armitage was clever, and he had had ten days in which to make his story watertight, at least for a time. It was very possible that he had been previously aware of Strom's having arranged for a term's absence ; and that he had thus known that he would have time to make new arrangements, and leave Gorchester without any suspicion of a flight.

If the pair had been married—and the Colonel was fairly sure that this must be so—then the fact of their going off together would have a most natural air ; indeed, it would seem the only natural course for them to pursue. Strom was most unlikely to blazen forth anything so humiliating to himself as his wife's perfidy. He might in fact leave the whole secret of



his marriage unknown, at least unless or until he decided to apply for a divorce.

In short, the Colonel felt that he still harboured a belief in Armitage's guilt ; and this belief was fostered next day by a piece of evidence obtained for him by Hayes from a boatman down at Rose Point. He kept this new food for suspicion strictly to himself, however, and set his men to work to find the record of Strom's marriage. This was soon forthcoming, from a registry office at Bath ; and the statement that the newly-married pair spent the night after the ceremony at the Cornwood Hotel was also found to be quite correct. So far, so good. If he could now find any bit of evidence that would show Strom's wife to have been with him on board the yacht, it seemed that he must own himself mistaken and accept Armitage's wild yarn as being entirely true. In pursuance of this line, he went on Tuesday evening to call upon the elderly scientific man named Dr. Selby, who was just back from Lisbon.

The doctor, being but half an hour returned from a long and tedious journey, was not best pleased to have a visitor ; but on receipt of Borrow's card he at once admitted him.

Borrow apologetically promised not to keep him long—a matter, he explained, of a letter to Dr. Strom which had gone wrong. He was anxious for news both of him and his wife.

Old Selby stared at him, blinking behind his horn-rimmed glasses. "His wife?" he piped. "Lord man, we're not speaking of the same

indiveedual. Strom with a wife ! Are ye wool-gathering ? ”

The Colonel smiled. “ The fact that Dr. Strom was recently married is incontrovertible,” he replied. “ His wife was on the yacht with him, was she not ? ”

“ If she was, then on the yacht she stayed,” asserted Dr. Selby. “ I saw and heard nothing of her ; and though Strom’s an eccentric, mind ye—a real eccentric—if he’d been recently married, even he wouldn’t have suppressed her like that ! ”

Borrow could not help laughing. “ If you knew Mrs. Strom you would know there could be no question of suppressing her,” he replied. “ She is a beauty and a bit of a highbrow too, I understand—the kind of wife any husband would want to parade——”

“ Well, man, understand this,” asserted Selby. “ I was staying at a smallish hotel, not the one where most of the conference was lodged, because I put in my claim to join the party rather late. However, what I’m telling ye is this. The conference opened on the Tuesday morning. Strom did not arrive until Tuesday afternoon. He had to speak on behalf of the University of Gorchester and we were all in a fume lest he wasn’t coming after all. However, he got there just in time, and apologized for delay, saying that he had travelled all the way by sea and the weather had been dirty. He was looking ill. I thought—haggard—but sea-sickness makes a man look so. Well, he stayed the night at the same hotel where I was, and on the following day he was very busy, had things to do all day and the President’s official reception



in the evening. We didn't get back to our lodging until half-past one in the morning, they keep such shocking hours in Portugal—nobody seems to start the evening until ten o'clock or so—don't dine at the hotels until after nine—awful bad for the digestion ; however, that's neither here nor there. All I can tell you is that there was no sign nor symptom of Mrs. Strom. I never did like the man much, I own, but he seemed to me extra surly and difficult—even more unamiable than usual. The next morning I happened to be breakfasting at the same time as he was, and I saw a wireless message brought to him. He opened it and turned as pale as ashes. For a moment he sat there like a stone image, then he said, as if he was panting for breath, 'All right—no answer,' he says, and dismisses the messenger. A minute later he flings down his napkin, all twisted into a rope, thrusts the message into his pocket and goes off. I saw no more of him, but——”

“You don't know where the message came from, I suppose?”

“No idea, not the vaguest. But off he went, and the conference saw him no more. That evening the yacht steamed out of harbour with him aboard, and she turned north, making for Biarritz or Bordeaux or somewhere like that. And now you have all I can tell ye of Dr. Claud Strom.”

The Chief Constable thanked the old fellow, and after a few more cordialities departed, with food for much reflection, and told his chauffeur to drive to Professor Armitage's rooms.

On arrival there he was informed that the Professor had gone up to the observatory, to meet a few members of his astronomy class. It was a fine starlit night, but Colonel Borrow guessed that the students would most of them depart by ten o'clock, and it was now more than half-past nine. He decided to follow to the mill and see if he could find out anything more ; he could at least study Armitage's reactions when suddenly confronted with the news that although Strom had been to Lisbon, apparently his wife had not accompanied him thither.

CHAPTER XXIX

PHILIP SCORES AGAIN

AS the Chief Constable drove in the solemn starlight up to the gate of the old mill its door opened, light gushed forth and a talkative group of students of both sexes emerged from the door and descended the outer stair, laughing and chattering. He waited while these packed into a couple of cars and drove off, shouting their thanks to Armitage, whose voice, as he bade them good night seemed to the perturbed Colonel quite unsuited to the use of a man over whose head hung such dark suspicion.

"Hullo !" Philip paused in the act of turning away, and peered at the car edging in towards the fence. "Who comes here? Thought I had got rid of you all——"



He broke off short as Borrow switched on the light in the interior of his car and revealed his identity. He was, however, equal to the occasion and, though not enthusiastic, offered adequate greeting.

"I don't suppose," he remarked as his visitor alighted, "that you are smitten with a desire to behold the stars—but at any rate come upstairs ; I think those young beggars have left a drop of whisky."

Borrow preceded him up to the door and walked in once more on the scene of the sanguinary dispute. His host set an arm-chair for him and brought forward the decanter ; but the Colonel declined to drink, very much with the air of shaking off the dust of his feet.

"I'd better come at once to my reason for this late call," he said stiffly, with a disapproving glance at Philip, seated upon the table, swinging his legs and sipping a drink. "I have just been to call upon Dr. Selby, who, as I think you know, went to the conference and is just back. It appears that Strom stayed at the same hotel as he did, so he ought to be a credible witness. He informs me that Strom spent only forty-eight hours in Lisbon ; also that he seemed deeply depressed, and that *Mrs. Strom was not with him.*"

Philip set down his glass and stared. "Not with him ? "

Incredulity and surprise were, as the Colonel, watching his man keenly, inly told himself "duly registered"—as on the films. What an actor this fellow was ! "That surprises you ? " he asked dryly. "I must say that I understood you to say yesterday

when you met us all to offer your explanation, that you had cabled to Professor Streeter and ascertained that the Stroms were there."

"Well, but of course," said Philip with the air of a man bewildered, "of course I took it for granted that if he was there she was there . . . since they went off together. . . ."

"Did they?" The tone was sarcastic to the point of being offensive, but Philip's mind was off on a speculative journey, and he did not remark the open disbelief which it expressed.

"It's odd," he muttered. "Very odd. . . . I wonder——" Swinging himself off the table he took a turn through the room and came back. "I—wonder," he said again, lost in thought.

"He's gaining time while he invents something," decided the Colonel, his observant eyes fixed upon him. "He's very clever and resourceful: what way out of this will he find?"

"The idea that occurs to me," remarked Philip presently, "is this. You see, Mrs. Strom is the kind of person you couldn't overawe or—or keep out of sight if she wanted to show up——"

"As I pointed out just now to Selby," was the ironic comment.

"And so, if she did not appear, it must have been because she *chose* not to appear. . . . You remember, I told you how utterly disgusted she was with him when they set out together? I thought he was for it, poor chap, at the time. . . . Well, I believe she kept that up. She had sea-sickness as a fine excuse for



remaining invisible during the passage from England ; and I expect she wouldn't let him come near her." Philip grinned engagingly. " Smart generalship," he remarked. " She was in the wrong from start to finish, and well she knew it. Her best chance was to turn the tables on him and treat him as if he was in disgrace. When a man's in love, he'll grovel no end, just to be back in the good graces of the beloved object. You can be sure she knows the way to make him squirm ! In fact she had begun already when we parted ! Now you say that they arrived late—detained by bad weather. He had no time to propitiate her—was forced to dash off from the yacht in time to keep his appointment to lecture. He had no choice but to leave her behind for the moment ; and until he saw her again he would not dare so much as to mention her presence to the others, lest she might decline to show up at all. How's that for a reconstruction ? "

" Plausible," was the reluctant reply.

" I feel, in short, pretty positive that as soon as her husband left the yacht she decamped ; went off somewhere on her own."

The Colonel broke off the ash of his cigarette against the edge of the table. The thing was certainly conceivable. " Your psychology is grounded upon a pretty close acquaintance with the lady, doubtless. . . . In support of your theory I may tell you that on the second day of his stay at the hotel, Selby saw a wireless telegram brought to Strom at breakfast. He turned very white, left the table abruptly, and on the afternoon

of that same day departed finally on board the yacht, which steered northward as though bound for France."

"You see!" commented Philip eagerly.

"Do you really suggest that she could and would set off alone? And travel alone?" pursued the Colonel.

"As easy as kiss my hand! She's an experienced traveller. She would tell the maid or the stewardess, or whoever it was, that she had arranged with Dr. Strom to join him at his hotel. She would simply take what things she needed, be rowed to the landing-stage, make her way to Cook's as soon as she was free of the yacht's crew, take her ticket and enter the train. Now the question is, where did she go?—because she had plenty of time to go quite a long way before he started in pursuit, and she had money with her you may be sure, seeing they were bound on a three months' cruise."

"Where do you think she might have gone?"

"I have simply no idea, except that she would choose a place where he was least likely to find her. He, I think, would have made for Evian, as being the most likely refuge for her to fly to. I should not have thought she would come back to England; but something that happened to-day makes me wonder——"

"Can you explain?"

"Yes, certainly. You know Miss Pendered? She was about the only friend of her own sex that Irma Varick made here—thereby showing her excellent taste! I am giving Miss Pendered special lessons this term, at three o'clock in the afternoons, and I had a note from her this morning saying she had been called



away out of Gorchester on an urgent summons, and would be unable to take her lesson. Of course the summons may have been anything, she did not specify . . . but suppose it were from Mrs. Strom?"

The Colonel's eyes were upon him. The suggestion was ingenious . . . Philip was ingenious. . . .

"What do you suggest that we should do in the matter?" was the dry query.

"You might go and see Miss Hawke. She almost certainly was told where Miss Pendered went——"

The Colonel's mouth twisted. "As it happens I thought it best to come to the man most likely to *know*," he said shortly. "Nothing like going at once to headquarters."

There was a silence. Philip had wheeled round upon his visitor fiercely. His eyes blazed and he looked dangerous.

"Which means that in spite of what I told you yesterday you still cling to your amazing idea of my guilt?" he asked in a raised tone.

The other shrugged his shoulders. Philip had the art of making him lose his temper. "All that you told me yesterday hung upon the one fact that Mrs. Strom is still alive and well," he said. "I felt that, in spite of my own strong suspicion of you, if this were true I must admit your innocence, even in face of the evidence against you. But what I heard from Dr. Selby does not clear you. In fact it goes the other way. I still demand—Where is Mrs. Strom?"

Philip had turned perfectly white, and as he stood, both fists on the table, glaring into the other man's

face, he might have been either a creature goaded into fury by unjust accusation or a clever criminal at bay and desperate.

"Why," said he slowly, "this man believes it—he actually believes that I murdered a girl and threw her into the river! Don't forget, if you please, that this charge, monstrous as it is, has got to be proved. What proof have you? I challenge you to tell me!"

Those words completed the Chief Constable's belief in his guilt. He thought he knew the one fact upon which Armitage was relying for security; and he was so stung by the young man's attitude of what he felt to be insolent confidence that he spoke unadvisedly, trying final bluff in the angry desire to beat down his guard. Leaning his folded arms upon the table, he fixed his keen, steady gaze upon the indignant face before him and said in a low voice:

"You are an able man, Armitage, and, like all clever criminals, you have told the truth as far as you could. But I suggest to you that you have not told *all* the truth. I believe it to be quite true that Dr. Strom and Miss Varick were both here at the mill on the night of last Friday week, and that it is also the fact that there was an altercation between him and you. But I do *not* believe that *they were here at the same time*. I put it to you that, when Strom arrived, he did not find his wife with you, for the reason that she was already dead, and that you had concealed her body, either somewhere in this mill, or, as I personally think probable, in your car. I suppose her death not to have been premeditated on your part, but the result



of a sudden access of rage and furious passion——” He broke off short, because of the attitude of the accused, who had moved away to a short distance and stood, cigarette between his fingers, listening with the half-indulgent, half-contemptuous attention one gives to a child.

“Your reconstruction is also ingenious,” he told his accuser coolly, almost lightly. “But will it hold water? In the case you have just outlined in so masterly a manner, how do you suggest that I got rid, first of the bridegroom and then of the corpse?”

The goaded Colonel at once replied, “I know the answer to both those questions. You told Strom that his wife had been your mistress; and when he had left you drove to Rose Crag and sank the body in the quicksand just below the ferry at Rose Point.”

After a silence which Borrow interpreted to indicate that he had scored a surprise, “Has the body been found?” asked Philip tonelessly.

“No. But Tod, the old boatman at Rose Point, says that his boat was used, by some person unknown, that night.”

“I seem to be a past-master in the art of crime. Have you guessed why, seeing that I am so accomplished a murderer, I did not drop the suit-case also into the quicksand? And can you explain why I should take off a dead girl’s clothes, and thus make two incriminating parcels instead of one?”

“Yes, I have the answer to both those difficulties. To take the second first—a naked corpse is far easier to sink than one in petticoats; and to the first I reply

that it took you longer than you foresaw to dispose of the body, so that you were too late for the rush of the ebb. Manifestly you could not carry both body and suit-case at the same time from your hidden car to the water."

"Quite a complete case," observed Philip, "as you said just now of my own story—so much truth in it, though not the whole truth. I did use Tod's boat for the suit-case, so as to drop it in mid-stream. . . . But I understood you to say that the body has not yet been recovered?"

The Colonel frowned until his eyes almost disappeared. He knew it to be almost impossible that anything should ever be recovered from the quicksand, and he thought he saw the confidence born of that knowledge in the culprit's eye and heard it in the sarcastic inflexion of his voice.

"That's what you're counting on, isn't it?" he said irritably. "But I fear your clever story isn't going to stand against so much evidence on the other side. The thing which is definitely wrecking it is the fact that no news has come from the newly-married pair. One can believe that it was their wish to keep their marriage secret until it was a *fait accompli*, but I do not find it credible that they should have gone away without one word of reassurance for the anxiety of those concerned."

"Yes, it's a bit thick, I grant you. With your unerring perception you have put your finger on the spot. It's unfortunate that I am a good deal less accomplished as a forger than as a murderer. I



couldn't manage a letter. Though, now I look back on it, I wonder I didn't try my hand on a few telegrams."

As Armitage spoke he laughed a trifle unnaturally and moved rather suddenly, turning upon Borrow, who had risen and was standing close to him. "Quite enough evidence to justify an arrest, isn't there? All things considered, you are a bold man to confront me here with so much heavy artillery—and to come alone and unarmed. But perhaps you are not unharmed? I am all right if it's fisticuffs, but not sufficiently Americanized to pack a gun, as they say. Let me see—as well to be on the safe side!" With a movement so sudden that his dignified adversary was caught completely unawares, he got an effectual grip on him, and, in spite of his struggles, felt him carefully all over before letting him go. "All right—no firearms! . . . Well now, Colonel, what are you going to do about it?"

Borrow, in face of this exhibition of muscular strength, thought it best to swallow his annoyance, though Philip's behaviour was every moment confirming his worst suspicions.

"I admit," he said, coolly enough, "that I have put myself at a disadvantage. You can easily tie me up while you make your escape. But it won't be much use, you know. You'll be caught inevitably."

Philip stood with his hands in his pockets, gazing at him with rather rueful speculation in his eye. "I'm glad you came alone, Colonel," he said slowly, "and that I am the only person to whom you gave

yourself away as you have done. You're one of the best, and your chain of circumstantial evidence is extraordinarily convincing. But your judgment has been warped by continual contact with the criminal mind. . . . Now toddle along, and if you like to waste the public money by setting on cops to watch me, do it ! But don't you dare to arrest me, or I'll make the place too hot to hold you ! I'm not going to jail on account of Mrs. Claud Strom and her vagaries, so kindly understand that at once——"

He broke off, listening. "Hallo ! A car stopping ! Is this your posse of police arriving ?" There was fury in his voice.

Borrow wished it were. To have arrested Armitage at that moment would have been sweet to him. He was fuming with mortification, and could hardly understand how he had come to mishandle the situation so completely. When he arrived, he had hoped to jolt Armitage into some kind of self-betrayal ; he had not meant to go as far as he had done in open accusation. The suspect had goaded him on and then laughed at him !

Voices were heard below—certainly not police voices. Footsteps were ascending the outer stair—certainly not police footsteps. . . .

Armitage went to the door and opened it. There peeped in the sweet flushed face of Dilys Pendered, seemingly literally to sparkle with joy.

"Oh, Philip, you are here ! I thought you must be, but it would have been so horrid to find Professor



Dalton or someone like that ! I am so glad——” Her voice died away as she beheld the visitor standing in the background.

### CHAPTER XXX      IRMA TRIES TO HEDGE

“**Y**OU have a visitor—you are busy perhaps ?” said Dilys in sudden shyness ; but Armitage caught her hands and drew her forward, his face suddenly alight with eagerness.

“ I do hope you haven’t come alone,” he said in his most sarcastic tones. “ It really won’t do, you know——”

“ Oh, no, I’m not alone. Garrie’s here—he has been with me all day——”

“ Right ! Because it simply isn’t safe for any young woman to come unprotected to this Bluebeard’s chamber. The Colonel here will tell you that I think nothing of murdering a young woman and stripping her corpse ! In fact, he’s just off to summon his myrmidons and bid them drag the quicksand in the estuary for Irma’s body ! ”

Dilys, who now knew him so surprisingly well, could feel the smart of intolerable indignation that writhed behind his sneering words. She laughed out gaily, knowing how completely she was bringing him comfort. She advanced into the room and shook hands

with the Chief Constable, who gave his hand very stiffly, disliking Philip's flippancy and her mirth. "Oh, Colonel," said she happily, "you needn't go to all that trouble! Irma is here, in the car. Garrie and I have brought her, because she wants to see Philip and beg him to forgive the trouble she has made for him."

"Mrs. Strom here!" roared Borrow, striding forward in a kind of fury of resentment, his main thought an ardent desire that the young woman in question should be punished for the trick she had played. At the moment the fur-clad form of Mrs. Claud Strom appeared in the doorway, closely followed by Garrie Ord, who carefully closed the door behind them both.

There stood Helen of Troy, her face a curious mixture of feeling. Some shame there may have been, but the consciousness of being the centre of interest, the causer of a tremendous sensation, was dominant as she glanced under her lashes at Philip. There was a confusion of greeting as she was introduced to the Chief Constable. Philip shouted above the chatter to Garrie that he should run upstairs and bring down the big acetylene lamp from the observatory to throw more light on the proceedings.

Philip pushed forward the big arm-chair to receive Irma, who slipped off her big coat, just as she had done the last time she took that seat, and throned herself, in all the charm of a trousseau frock, sighing out, "Oh, Phil!" in the tones she had always found so irresistible.



Dilys, motionless a little in the background, watched that witching appeal, and almost on the instant Armitage turned to her and the glance they exchanged told her that its only effect was to amuse him. He brought a chair for her, and indeed she was in need of it, for her head was swimming with the sense of joy in his being completely cleared, and still more with a kind of inner knowledge that Irma had no more power to do harm in his direction.

As she seated herself, Garrie came down the stairs he had ascended, carrying a brilliant lamp, which he proceeded to fix upon a wire hung from the roof. Borrow, who was standing beside the heroine of the occasion, obtained a full view of that beauty which (he had to own) even her fervent friend had not overpraised. He turned to his host and asked in most unusual embarrassment if he might stay a few minutes and hear the news.

Armitage's assent was instant, and "Oh, *do*!" said Irma, lifting the glorious globes of her eyes to the distinguished official, as he helped her to dispose of the wrap she had just discarded, acknowledging to himself that Dilys had not exaggerated when she described this girl as one who could drive men mad. . . . So this was the witch who had melted the icicle Claud Strom! . . . With bated breath he listened for what she had to say. She was evidently bursting with the desire to explain things.

"I must begin," she cried, "with an accusation! It really hasn't been all my fault! In fact, the whole trouble has been Philip's incomparable

stupidity. Yes, Armie, I assert that you are a perfect blockhead ! ”

“ I think that’s quite likely,” replied the accused at once, “ though to what particular folly of mine you allude I haven’t the vaguest ! However, the Chief Constable here doesn’t think that stupidity is one of my outstanding points, do you, Colonel ? ”

“ I assure you,” went on Irma, with a sweet warmth of urgency, “ when Garrie and Dil arrived to fetch me this morning, there never was a more surprised girl in the world ! They greeted me like one risen from the dead, urging me to fly at once to the longing arms of my sorrowing uncle and aunt, arrived from the Continent and at that moment in Gorchester. ‘ But what are they doing here ? ’ I begged to be told, my head going round and round—as it has never quite left off doing since those awful hours in the Bay of Biscay—and when the answer came, ‘ They have come over to set the police hunting for you everywhere,’ I simply couldn’t understand why that should be. Because, you see, Claud and I had written to everybody to explain. We had been quite humble—even rather apologetic—but we stated quite lucidly that we had got married on the quiet because Claud does so hate fuss, being the shyest man on earth. What are you snorting for, Philip ? ”

“ Only at the idea of Strom’s shyness—but get on ! What can you mean by saying that you wrote to announce your startling news ? ”

“ I mean that I wrote to Miss Hawke and also to Mrs. Jenkins, and that Claud wrote to the Principal



and also to Pratt ; and we put all four letters together in my black brocade pochette——”

“ A-a-ah ! ” from Armitage in an enlightened breath. Words to the same effect from the Colonel and Dilys.

“ You see, I went out to post them on that eventful evening when I eloped. But I had also to send off a telegram from the post office that night, and when I reached home again I remembered that in my hurry and confusion I had forgotten to put the letters in the box. They were still in my hand when I got back to Houston Square, and there also was Philip, in a perfectly abominable temper, which completed my mental agitation. I had to explain to him that I wanted to be driven to a certain house, with my luggage, and that if he liked he could drive me there, but that I had no time to spare. However, he had got the bit between his teeth and I could do nothing with him. He drove me to the mill and insisted that I go upstairs and have it out. . . . Well, I expect you all know what happened after that, and what Philip did to Claud. Oh, that was Claud’s fault, I own—he began it. . . . However, as you may suppose, I had other things to think of than posting letters ; and it was not until long, long afterwards—when I was just beginning to come out of my stupor of sea-sickness after the storm—that I remembered the letters had not been posted. The stewardess searched my luggage, my bag, all my things—no pochette ! So then I felt sure I had left the thing at the mill, and, as you may suppose, I argued to myself that Armie was an ordinary

sensible mortal and that, if he found lying about a case, with four letters ready stamped for post therein, he would have no hesitation in posting them ; more particularly as he would instantly guess, from the addresses, that they were rather urgent. . . . So I didn't worry any more. . . . What *did* you do with those letters, Phil ? ”

Armitage cleared his throat. “ Well, if you want to know, I pitched the wretched thing into the water. You see, I thought it was empty—it felt quite flat.”

The Chief Constable corroborated. “ When it was picked up it *was* quite empty,” said he. “ I can vouch for that ! ”

“ Queer,” mused Irma. “ I don't understand it at all.”

“ Nor I,” remarked Garrie, “ because, if someone else had found the thing first, taken out the contents and flung it back into the water, you would think the finder, whoever he was, would have done something about it, wouldn't you ? ”

“ Yes, you certainly would,” agreed Dilys. “ But, oh, Irma, I still can't understand your goings on ! You deserve to be whipped for the way in which you made use of us all to hide your little games. You don't know how to manage your husband a bit, that's certain, or you would have insisted upon his marrying you boldly before the world or not at all.”

“ Of course that is what I ought to have done,” replied Irma thoughtfully. “ Phil, are you going to bear malice ? ”

“ Not a ha'porth ! On the contrary, I am grateful



to you," he replied, so promptly and so heartily that Irma looked much surprised and by no means delighted. "I've had the time of my life, pulling the Chief Constable's leg ! Only I was so afraid he would haul me to quod before you two had time to sit up and take notice ! Both Garrie and he believed, I think, in my nefarious doings. Only one person was steadfast. She never seriously thought me a murderer, did you, Dilys ? "

He paused but an instant before calling her thus by name ; but he did not know how much the tones of his voice revealed. Irma flashed a glance at Dilys, sitting with slightly parted lips and eyes shining. Garrie's look travelled in the same direction. Dilys did not reply and Philip went on :

"You'll have your work cut out, Mrs. Strom, taming that husband of yours. It would be a shame to add a deadly feud with me to all your other cares——"

"That brings us to our point," cut in Garrie. "We regret to announce that Mrs. Strom has mislaid her husband. That is to say, she ran away from him, and now that she's willing to say she's sorry, she doesn't know where he has gone."

"You really are a careless girl," said Philip to Irma reprovingly. "Hardly have the police in England been calmed down with enormous difficulty and at great expense than you start rushing all over the Continent ! And before we know where we are the French, Spanish, Swiss, and Italian *Suretés* will all be offering rewards for news of you. You are simply determined to become notorious, are you not ? "

"Oh, don't rub it in!" There was such real pain in Irma's voice that Philip broke off short. "I want to know where he is," she mourned. "I was perfectly brutal to him—wouldn't see or speak to him, and then dashed off and left him! And now I'm desperately sorry, and I feel he may go sailing away in that yacht right across the world, and I shall never be able to catch him."

"That *was* a silly stunt of yours, bolting like that! I can't think why you did it——"

"At the time I did it I really meant to leave him," said Irma in a very low voice. "I thought I had made a hash of my whole life—married the wrong man." She glanced under her lashes at Armie. "I meant to have a separation—at least, I *think* I meant to."

"Nonsense!" retorted Philip unfeelingly. "Nothing of the kind. You meant to have him grovelling, and then to extend your royal forgiveness, but, like a wise man, he isn't having any! When he gets back he'll find a suitably chastened wife, glad of his company——"

"Upon my word!" broke forth the bride indignantly, "you all of you seem to console yourselves pretty easily! I think I have been wasting a lot of sympathetic affection over you, Phil, for example!"

"Even wounds made by Helen of Troy are not always incurable," he mocked. "But the thing I imagine we have to consider is how to find this truant bridegroom! Or perhaps the Chief Constable will tell you that all the time we are talking his mouldering corpse lies under these floor-boards."



"That's enough of your impudence," said the Colonel, quite good-humouredly. "The first thing is for Mrs. Strom to furnish us with the name of the ports at which the 'Tapestry' meant to put in, and to cable to them all. I am told that the yacht steamed northward. If she put in at the nearest French port, and Strom landed and began to search, she may be still there. He would have made inquiries from the people at Lisbon before setting off, so he would know which way you went."

A general discussion followed, lasting, however, but a few minutes. Irma was on her feet, restless, eager to be off. The party had driven first to Armie's rooms, then up to Welwych, and were now bound for Houston Square, where the Varicks' anxiety would be relieved and whence telephone messages could be sent to Mrs. Gray and Miss Hawke.

Colonel Borrow also rose to take leave. His offer to set to work the resources at his disposal on the task of discovering the lost yacht was most gratefully received. He congratulated Irma upon her reappearance and expressed his best hopes for a "happy ending" to the affair.

At the moment the sound of a car was heard once more upon the lonely road. It approached very rapidly from the opposite direction to that in which Gorchester lay, and stopped abruptly at the mill gate.

"Now who in the world?" murmured Armie as they all stood still listening. "The later it gets the more densely populated Welwych Moor seems to grow,

I've noticed. Expect it's old Dalton—won't he be surprised to drop into the middle of my soirée?"

"Dalton would come the other way," muttered Garrie.

Someone had ascended the ladder, but no key was inserted. A knock was heard.

"Expect he has seen a light," muttered the host as Garrie went to the door.

It was Strom who stood there, and who, at sight of the assembled company, turned as if to bolt, until arrested by a high treble call of "Claud! Claud!"

His face changed; a look flashed into it as of mingled disbelief and rapture. He made a few steps forward and, like the jewelled flash of a kingfisher crossing the stream, Irma hurled herself across the space intervening and flung herself into his arms.

There was no mistaking the fervency of the embrace in which she was received. For a long moment they clung together, while their friends stood round silent. Then Garrie broke the spell with a loud "Hurrah! Three cheers for the bride and bridegroom!"

"Hip-hip!" said everyone, Colonel Borrow among the most enthusiastic. Philip noticed that Irma quickly whispered a short sentence into her husband's ear. It might have been, "If you love me, play up," or words to that effect. Then she and he turned to face their audience, his arm around her and his face illumined by a genuine smile, such as no one ever remembered seeing him wear before. The improvement in his looks was marvellous, in spite of his haggard aspect, as of sleepless nights.



There ensued a babel of confused talk and of hand-shaking, through which it was difficult for Strom to understand why they were all there, or anything that had happened. But presently they subsided a little, Philip produced a bottle of benedictine liqueur, and healths were drunk while bits of news and explanations were bandied about.

Claud first related how it was that he had returned to England.

There was a member of his crew whose mother and father kept a tourist inn at Lashdyke, the remote spot whence Garrie and Dilys had that morning fetched Irma. These good people knew that Dr. Strom was on board the yacht, and they heard through a ship-master of their acquaintance that she had put in at Bordeaux. They had dimly sensed something wrong the moment they saw Irma, and they felt it their duty to cable to their son at once with the news that Mrs. Strom was in their home.

Irma, who had once stayed a few days at Lashdyke with her uncle and aunt, had thought it a safe place in which to lie hidden until she had made up her mind what to do. She did not wish to let her uncle and aunt know of her wrecked marriage until she had had time to decide whether she really meant to dissolve it permanently.

When she could bear her loneliness no longer—a matter of a very few hours, now that she looked back upon it—she telephoned to Dilys Pendered, who instantly rang up Garrie and commandeered him and the larger car to drive her to fetch the truant home forthwith.

When Claud, landing at Bordeaux and making fruitless inquiries there, had been shown the cablegram from Lashdyke, he had given orders for the yacht to be sailed across to England at once. He himself had caught the *train de luxe* for Paris, whence he had flown to Croydon, and taken train to the west. He had in his pocket the check for his car, which he had garaged at Weymouth, meaning to post the check to Pratt; and, as Lashdyke is almost inaccessible by train, he thought it would save time in the end if he fetched his car and drove thither. He reached the little inn only to learn that Mrs. Strom had left an hour or two before, with friends who had called for her.

The good folks with whom she had stayed were almost sure that she had gone to Gorchester.

The harassed husband waited only to have some food, of which he stood sorely in need, and then went off in pursuit. He drove by way of Welwych Moor, and when, as he passed, the lights indicated that Armitage was at the mill, and he saw no less than three cars waiting in the road outside, he took the desperate resolve to call in, hoping for news. His desperation was caused in part by a discovery which, to his consternation, he had made when he went to fetch his car.

Rolled up on the seat of it lay an old driving-coat which he had worn for the drive from Gorchester on the night of the fracas at the mill, but which he had not intended to take abroad with him. Finding it handy, and being cold, he was glad to slip it on when he reclaimed the car, and as he buttoned it he felt



something in the breast pocket. To his horror he drew forth four letters, stamped and ready for post!

There was a universal cry of amazement. "But how could they have got there?" cried everybody.

"I put them there myself," he admitted with some confusion. "I found them in Irma's little vanity-case, lying on the table at the mill. She was changing her things behind the screens, and Armitage had gone outside to fetch fresh water. I was alone, and still very muzzy in the head, but I did realize that these letters were most important, that Irma had apparently forgotten to post them, and that they must be dispatched before we left England. So I put them in the breast pocket of my outer coat, meaning to give them to one of the crew to post when we reached the quay. . . . You must all understand that I was only intermittently conscious, and although I remember doing what I have just told you, I remember no more until Armitage came to help me down the ladder out there, which he did most kindly and carefully." . . . At this point he hesitated a moment, almost as though contemplating an apology, but much to Philip's relief thought better of it and went on. "By the time I had made the descent, I knew I was in no condition to drive, and was forced to let Irma take the wheel. I think I was partly unconscious for quite a good deal of the way, but I had pulled myself together by the time we arrived at Weymouth.

"We found the men waiting for us—we were a good hour later than we had planned to be—and they took all our things aboard and garaged the car and

so on. I remembered that I was leaving the coat behind, and took it off without a thought of the letters it contained. I must own that I was terribly pre-occupied, because of Irma's attitude to me. I feared I had wounded her past forgiveness, and I was longing for a chance to beg her pardon, but I was too utterly done in to be able to plead my own cause at that time, more especially with a nose on me like the Brasenose College horror!

"We had a nightmare passage, and only berthed at Lisbon just in time for me to jump into the launch and dash ashore to keep my engagement to lecture at the conference. I never thought of a thing all the way out except how to make things right between me and Irma, who was still quite implacable, although the stewardess assured me that she was really too ill to talk. . . . In short, the whole business of the letters had faded from my memory completely until I found them this afternoon and realized that people must be wondering what had become of us." . . .

CHAPTER XXXI "TO-MORROW AT HALF-PAST TWO?"

"TO say that we wondered is to put it *very* mildly," commented Garrie scathingly. "Years have been taken from Mrs. Gray's life, the Kestrel has been



knocked completely off her perch, Armie has been within an inch of arrest on a murder charge, and, from what I hear, even the Principal has been a good deal bothered——”

“That is the main thing I’m anxious about, now that I’ve got my wife safe,” cut in Strom, addressing himself to Armitage. “Of course, I’m no end sorry that you’ve had such a time of it, but more of that hereafter. What I want you to tell me is—Is Benwell functioning? I did post my letter to him, the day before we sailed, asking him to let Pratt know when he would arrive; but he must have been somewhat bewildered when he got here to find that neither Pratt nor the Principal expected him.”

“Oh, he’s there all right, and seems quite a decent sort,” replied Philip. “Dalton thinks highly of him——”

“Thanks! I’m relieved,” said Strom, drawing a long breath, as though a weight were off his chest. “That being so, a written message should suffice—there seems no need for a personal explanation at present. Consequently, I want to make a somewhat odd request of you all—that is, if my wife consents to the idea.” He turned towards Irma a look which seemed to hesitate, as if even now he was not quite sure of how he stood with her. He caught her glance and apparently it satisfied him, for he went on. “I would ask the same thing that we asked of Armitage on that unlucky night—namely, that this nocturnal incursion of ours this evening should be kept secret from all except those actually present. . . .”

Colonel Borrow cleared his throat. "We must remember at what cost Professor Armitage kept his former secrecy——"

"Thanks for these kind words," murmured Philip, but Strom broke in eagerly.

"Oh, pardon, sir, but this promise is only binding until we have got clear away ; that is to say, that I would, as you will all understand, much prefer that this return of ours to England never got about at all ; but that must be a matter for the discretion of those concerned. My main desire is to depart without any beating of drums, and if we wish to do that, we must not even go and see Irma's people. I—I really don't feel on for any more fuss just now."

"Nor I !" cried Irma fervently. "Oh, Claud, how clever of you. Do realize, everybody, how sensible he is."

Her approbation evidently set the seal on his determination. He crossed the room to where the Chief Constable sat. "If we might venture to trouble him so far, we would place these four letters, just as they are, in the care of Colonel Borrow, and we would beg him to undertake to hand them to the people to whom they are respectively addressed. I would ask him to say that they have come into his possession by a roundabout way, and that he has reason to believe that the pochette in which they were enclosed was accidentally lost, the whole trouble having resulted from that fact. This will allay all anxiety on our behalf, and, if he adds that he knows for a fact that we are safe and sound and are off on our travels



together as we had planned, is there any need for us to appear in person ? ”

“ But your fatigue,” put in Dilys compassionately. “ I do think it’s a good plan, but don’t you want a long sleep and a good breakfast before anything else ? ”

“ We’ll have both,” Strom assured her, “ as soon as we are clear of Gorchester. We have plenty of time, for the yacht can’t be at our place of embarkation for another eighteen hours at least. If my wife will consent to dash off with me at once into the unknown, I really do think we shall be taking the least undignified way out of our difficulties.”

“ Absolutely,” said Philip with conviction. “ It’s what I’d do in your place, if that carries any weight with you ! Moreover, much as we admire you both, we prefer your room to your company just now. In fact, we look on you both as brawlers and disturbers of the academic calm in which we are frantically striving to immerse ourselves with a view to obtaining scholarships and what not. Off with you both and take our blessing with you ! Wedding presents are not at the moment on tap. You must wait for them until you come back and dwell among us, if such be your ultimate intention.”

“ We are not going to commit ourselves,” replied Strom with a smile that was almost mischievous. He turned to his wife and began as it were to take possession of her, helping her into her furs and picking up a small bag with her gloves from the table. “ Leave nothing behind this time,” he admonished her gravely, but with amused eyes ; then, as if with a sudden

impulse, "I can't make speeches, but I am truly grateful to you all, but especially of course to Armitage and to Miss Pendered, if she will allow me to say so. This won't be our last sight of you, but we've got to have our fling before we settle down. We are shaping our course for the world's end, and the yacht is lent to me for twelve months, so we won't even give you a hint as to our destination."

"But we know it!" cried Dilys joyfully. "El Dorado and the Fortunate Isles!"

As she spoke she was smiling up into Philip's eyes, and Irma abruptly disengaged herself from Claud, ran to her and pulled her away into a distant corner, out of earshot of the rest.

"This is a bit perplexing," she whispered, half joking, but, as Dil could not help divining, half affronted too. "Here am I married and done for! Oh, yes, I've done well for myself, as I told you I meant to do. One of the Strom uncles died recently and has left his pile—a quite considerable one—to Claud . . . and besides, I am very fond of Claud. I didn't marry him for money, but because I love him, or I suppose I do. . . . And yet—yet I can't resist the thought that after all I believe you have the better man of the two!"

"I have promised myself to no man," replied Dilys gravely and coldly. "Don't talk wildly. Are you trying to make me think you really meant to go back on Claud—that you thought you could come back here and pick up Philip just where you dropped him?"



Irma's colour betrayed how near this suggestion was to the truth. "If I thought so, my dear, I am thoroughly enlightened now on the subject," she said, with an amount of resentment which surprised Dilys. "How you've done it I don't know, but it seems almost without an effort! I'm surprised—yes, I'll own it was a smack in the face for me to find him so—well—so *utterly* cured!"

Dilys looked her full in the face. "You see, he hates lies," she said unflinchingly. "As soon as he found out that you were playing a double game the charm was broken. He discovered that you were not the girl he took you for, and that was the end."

For a moment Irma looked really furious. Then her eyes lit with mockery. "My dear, but how thoughtless of you to choose a man with that name—'Phil' and 'Dil' does sound so ridiculous, doesn't it?" she giped; and then, gloating over the rush of colour to Dil's face, she flashed a look across the room to where Philip stood watching them, and summoned him with a beckoning hand.

"Phil," she said, "I would like to tell you that I'm sorry. I treated you abominably, but I'm going to reform now—I am indeed! You—you won't refuse to let Dilys be friends with me, will you?"

She saw the instant effect upon the man at the implication, and the way in which his eyes dilated as he turned their look tenderly upon Dilys, somewhat pale and exhausted, standing by with Irma's gloves.

"If Dilys allows me to choose her friends, it will be a case of James Lee's wife with me, I think:

Should I know or care,  
When I should be dead with joy?"

he said, using his wonderful voice with telling effect. Instantly upon having spoken, he turned on his heel without a glance at Dilys, crossed the room, opened a drawer in a crazy old chest of drawers, and drew forth a piece of orange-coloured fur. Returning, he tossed it to Irma.

"Here, take the beastly thing: it almost got me hanged," he said. "But a day or two ago I took it out of hiding and put it in there, in plain sight, hoping that perhaps the Chief Constable and his merry men would have another search among my possessions. But they didn't rise to the bait! Well, good-bye, Cleopatra; give your Claud a fair deal, that's my parting admonition."

Dilys, looking at the aforesaid Claud's chin and jaw, felt that Irma's training was just about to begin.

They all accompanied the honeymoon pair down to the road and saw them installed in the Humber Snipe, which carried them off at once, running easily and rapidly away into their future.

The Chief Constable then bade the others good-bye and drove away without delay, hoping to be in time to relieve the anxiety of the Varicks before they retired for the night.

As Philip shut Dilys into the car beside Garrie he whispered eagerly, "To-morrow at half-past two?"

Her murmur of assent was low, but he heard it, and at once stepped back, satisfied, his eyes full of things unsaid.



But Garrie, as soon as they were well away, asked heavily, "Dil, is there anything between you and Armie?"

She hesitated a moment. "Nothing definite, Garrie."

"But you think—there may be?"

"I'd rather not discuss it, please."

"Oh, Dil, didn't you know—surely you must have known that I——"

"Dear old chap," said the girl sympathetically, "never in all the world should I fall in love with you, heartily though I love you. And for that reason you'll get over this early fancy of yours; in my view love, to be a permanent thing, must be mutual. It must! Your time hasn't come yet. Wait another seven years or so, and then she'll appear—your dream-come-true—and when you see her you'll be ever so glad that you waited for her."

THE END

